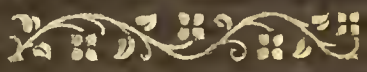
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Books and Authors

By

Robert Lynd

Delight, the parent of so many virtues.
Coleridge.

Let us enjoy, whenever we have an opportunity, the delight of admiration, and perform the duties of reverence.
Landor.

G. P. Putnam's Sons
New York & London
The Knickerbocker Press
1923

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PREFACE

TO THE AMERICAN EDITION

To write books about books has been spoken of as though it were a parasitic industry. Undoubtedly, books about books are among the least necessary of books. The world delighted in songs and epics and histories for centuries before it paused to attend to a literary critic. Even to-day, when men engage in the eternal discussion of the books with which they would like to be left on a desert island, I do not think a vote is ever given to a volume of criticism. The poet, the essayist, the novelist, the biographer, the philosopher, are all safe among the world's best authors: the critic must be content if he is given a place among the second-best. He is not a contributor to the hundred best books; the most that he can claim is that no collection of the thousand best books would be complete without him. Certainly, it is difficult to imagine a well-chosen library of a thousand books without a volume or two of literary criticism.

This may be because a thousand supremely good books have not yet been written—a melancholy reflection when we think of all the ink and paper that have been used since authorship began. I think, however, it is also partly due to the fact that as human society becomes civilised, books become more and more a necessary part of the environment of men and women, so that we may say that on the whole it is more natural for a civilised man to write a book about books than a book about birds or butterflies. In a highly-developed civilisation, literature inevitably takes literature as part of its subject-matter as it takes every other great human interest. Even the historian ends by admitting authors among his characters along with statesmen and soldiers, and in general literature we have poems on poets, essays on essayists, biographies of biographers, criticisms of critics, and novels about novelists. Writing about writers, indeed, has become in our day an all but universal practice, and it seems to me to stand in no more need of defence than writing about tramps or travellers, about business-men or burglars.

There is, I admit, always a danger that a writer about writers may become excessively professional. He may discuss writing as a cotton-manufacturer would discuss the manufacture

of cotton, telling us a great deal about the mechanism of production and nothing about the energies, sacrifices, and personal qualities that are the secret of genius in business as in the arts. Criticism of this kind is important, but its place is in a technical or professional treatise. Criticism, in order to justify itself as a branch of literature, must subordinate all such technical matter to philosophy or biography, or both,—must associate ideas about literature with ideas about life, as Schopenhauer did, or like Sainte-Beuve and Matthew Arnold, must portray in an author, not only an author, but a man.

Those critics who write about literature as though it were a cult for the few instead of a normal human interest, confine themselves largely to analysis—some of them to pretended analysis. They do not see that the critic's analysis is of value only if it leads to a synthesis. There is no use in his taking to pieces what he sees as the genius of Shakespeare if he cannot put it together again in such a way that it is mirrored in the minds and imaginations of his readers as well as in his own. It seems to me to be the positive task of criticism to create in one's own mind an image of a writer's genius and then to try to clear the minds of one's readers so that the same image will be reflected

in theirs. We may fail; but that, at least, is what we are attempting to do, or what we ought to be attempting to do.

ROBERT LYND.

LONDON, November, 1922.

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MORE OR LESS ANCIENT

I

HERRICK

Herrick was a gross and good-natured clergyman who had a double chin. He kept a pet pig, which drank beer out of a tankard, and he and the pig had probably a good many of the same characteristics. It would be a libel on him to say that he was a pig, but it would not be a libel to say that he was a pet pig.

His life, like the pet pig's, was not real, and it certainly was not earnest. He spent the best part of his youth mourning over the brevity of life, and he lived till he was comfortably over eighty. He was an Epicurean, indeed, in the vulgar sense of the word, whose dominant theme was the mortality of pretty things. For Herrick gives us the feeling that for him the world was a world of pretty things rather than of beautiful things. He was the son of a goldsmith in Cheapside, and himself served an apprenticeship to the trade. The effect of this may, I think, be seen in his verse. His spiritual home always remained

in Cheapside rather than in the Church which he afterwards entered. He enjoyed the world as though it were a street of shops. To read him is to call at the florist's and the perfumer's and the milliner's and the jeweller's and the confectioner's and the vintner's and the fruiterer's and the toy-seller's. If he writes, as he proclaims, of bridegrooms and brides, he does not forget the bride's dress or the bride's cake. His very vision of Nature belittles it to the measure of "golden Cheapside." He begins *Fair Days* with the lines:

> Fair was the dawn; and but e'en now the skies
> Show'd like rich cream, enspir'd with strawberries.

If he invites Phyllis to love him and live with him in the country, he reduces the hills for her to the size of bric-à-brac:

> Thy feasting-tables shall be hills
> With daisies spread, and daffodils.

He was one of those happily constituted men who can get pleasure from most things, and it is obvious that he got a great deal of pleasure from his life in Devonshire, where he was Vicar of Dean Prior, till he was ejected after the triumph of Cromwell in the Civil War. But his heart was never in Devonshire. There is no mirror

of Devonshire in his verse. He was a censorious exile amid beauty of that sort, and could have had all the flowers and country scenes he cared for within an hour's walk of the shop in Cheapside. He speaks in one of his poems of "this loathed country-life," and in the verses called *Dean-bourn, a rude River in Devon, by which he sometimes dwelt,* he bids the river farewell, and expresses the hope that he will never set eyes on its "warty incivility" again:

> To my content, I never should behold,
> Were thy streams silver, or thy rocks all gold.
> Rocky thou art, and rocky we discover
> Thy men, and rocky are thy ways all over.
> O men, O manners, now and ever known
> To be a rocky generation!
> A people currish, churlish as the seas,
> And rude almost as rudest savages.

There is no missing the sincere unappreciativeness of these lines. The best that he can say of Devon is not that it is beautiful but that he wrote some good verses in it:

> More discontents I never had
> Since I was born than here,
> Where I have been and still am sad,
> In this dull Devonshire.
> Yet justly too I must confess;

I ne'er invented such
Ennobled numbers for the Press
Than where I loathed so much.

It has been remarked that, even when he writes of fairies, he has in mind, not the fairies of the West Country, but the fairies he brought with him from Ben Jonson's London. He is rich in the fancies of the town-poet. For him Oberon walks through a grove "tinselled with twilight," and is led by the shine of snails. As for the cave in which the Fairy King seeks Queen Mab:

To pave
The excellency of this cave,
Squirrels' and children's teeth late shed
Are neatly here enchequered.

Oberon's Feast again is a revel of fantastical dishes not from nature, but from that part of the imagination that is a toy-shop:

A little moth
Late fattened in a piece of cloth:
With withered cherries; mandrake's ears;
Moles' eyes; to these, the slain stag's tears;
The unctuous dewlaps of a snail;
The broke heart of a nightingale
O'ercome in music.

The very titles of many of his poems seem to have come straight from the toy-shop. How charming some of them are:

A ternary of Littles upon a pipkin of Jelly sent to a lady;
Upon a Cherrystone sent to the tip of the Lady Jemonia Walgrave's ear;
Upon a black Twist, rounding the Arm of the Countess of Carlisle;
Upon Julia's Hair, bundled up in a golden net;
To the Fever, not to trouble Julia;
Upon Lucia, dabbled in the Dew;
The Funeral Rites of the Rose!

Most beautiful of all, perhaps, is the title of his most famous poem, "Gather ye rosebuds," which runs, *To the Virgins, to make much of time.* Herrick's small and delightful genius is as manifest in the titles of his poems as in the poems themselves. All the perfume of his verse is in such titles as *To live merrily, and to trust to Good Verses; To Mistress Katherine Bradshaw the lovely, that crowned him with Laurel; To the most virtuous Mistress Pot, who many times entertained him;* and, especially, *To Daisies, not to shut so soon.*

Herrick appears in his poetry, if we leave out of consideration the inferior religious verse in *Noble Numbers,* mainly in three characters. He is the cheerful countryman, the praiser of his mistresses, and the philosopher of the mortality of

pretty things. As for the first, he was too good a disciple of Horace not to be able to play the part cheerfully and to smile among his animals and his beans:

A hen
I keep, which, creaking day by day,
Tells when
She goes her long white egg to lay.
A lamb
I keep (tame) with my morsels fed,
Whose dam
An orphan left him (lately dead) . . .
A cat
I keep, that plays about my house,
Grown fat
With eating many a miching mouse.

As he writes down the list, he himself realises to what an extent his life in the country is a life of make-believe among toys:

Which are
But toys to give my heart some ease:
Where care
Ne'er is, slight things do lightly please.

His mistresses are, however, a thing apart from this happy farmyard. When he goes to the farmyard for a simile in praise of Julia, the effect is amusing, but it is a little lower than love-poetry:

Herrick

Fain would I kiss my Julia's dainty leg,
Which is as white and hairless as an egg.

Some critics have doubted whether Herrick ever was actually in love. They regard his Julias and Antheas and Lucias as but an array of Delf shepherdesses that every poet of the day was expected to keep on his table. This may be true of most of the ladies, but Julia seems real enough. Herrick was obviously incapable of the passion of Keats or Shelley or Browning, but we may take it that he had been enchained and enchanted by the lady with the black eyes and the replica of his own double chin:

Black and rolling is her eye,
Double-chinn'd, and forehead high;
Lips she has, all ruby red,
Cheeks like cream enclareted;
And a nose that is the grace
And proscenium of her face.

It is not a very attractive picture, and it is characteristic of Herrick that he can paint Julia's clothes better than he can paint her face. It was an enchained and enchanted man who wrote those lines that are far too well known to quote and far too charming to refrain from quoting:

Whenas in silks my Julia goes,
Then, then, methinks, how sweetly flows
The liquefaction of her clothes.
Next, when I cast mine eyes and see
That brave vibration each way free,
O how that glittering taketh me.

This is no figmentary picture. The songs to Julia—most of all, the glorious *Night Piece*—are songs of experience. Herrick may not have loved Julia well enough to marry her, even if she had been willing, but he loved her well enough to write good verses. He could probably have said farewell to any woman as philosophically as he said farewell to sack. He was a cautious man, and a predestined bachelor. He was, indeed, a man of no very profound feeling. There is no deep tide of emotion making his verse musical. He knew love and he knew regret, but not tragically. If he wept to see the daffodils haste away so soon, we may be sure that he brushed away his tears at the sound of the dinner-bell and forgot the premature death of the flowers in cheerful conversation with his housekeeper, Prue. This does not mean that his mood was insincere; it does not mean that in *To Daffodils* he did not give immortal and touching expression to one of the universal sorrows of men. He comes nearer the grave music

of poetry here than in any of his other poems. But the *Memento mori* that runs through his verses is the *Memento mori* of a banqueter, not of a sufferer. It is the mournfulness of a heart that has no intention of breaking.

Herrick proved a true prophet in regard to the immortality of his verse, though *Hesperides* made no great stir when it was published in 1648 and seems to have made no friends among critics till the end of the eighteenth century. But he never gave a wiser estimate of the quality of his work than those lines, in *When he would have his verses read,* where he bids us:

> In sober mornings do not thou rehearse
> The holy incantation of a verse;
> But when that men have both well drank and fed,
> Let my enchantments then be sung or read
> When the rose reigns, and locks with ointment shine,
> Let rigid Cato read these lines of mine.

This is the muse at play. It is absurd to speak of Herrick as though he were a great lyric poet. He is not with Shakespeare. He is not with Campion. But he is a master of light poetry—of poetry under the rose.

II

VICTOR HUGO

It is easy to disparage Victor Hugo, but, in order to disparage him, it is necessary to abstain from reading him. Take down his books and begin to read, and, even if you do not agree with the verdict, you will understand before long how it was that a generation or so ago people used to regard Victor Hugo as one of the great names in literature. It was only Swinburne, perhaps, who could describe him as "the greatest man born since the death of Shakespeare," but this did not seem an absurd exaggeration to the majority of readers at the time it was written, and even a crabbed critic like Henley accepted him as " plainly . . . the greatest man of letters of his day." His influence as well as his reputation was enormous and extended far beyond France. He was a great author for the great Russians. He was one of Dostoevsky's favourite writers, and *Notre Dame* was one of the books that influenced Tolstoy; even in his censorious old age

Tolstoy admitted *Les Misérables* through the strait gate of the best literature in *What is Art?* and it seems likely, as Madame Duclaux suggests, that it was at the back of his mind when he wrote *Resurrection.*

His greatest contemporaries, however, realised that Hugo was a charlatan as well as a man of genius. Madame Duclaux quotes Baudelaire's comment, "Victor Hugo—an inspired donkey!" and his assertion that the Almighty, "in a mood of impenetrable mystification," had taken genius and silliness in equal parts in order to compound the brain of Victor Hugo. She also quotes Balzac's criticism of the first night of *Les Burgraves:*

> The story simply does not exist, the invention is beneath contempt. But the poetry—ah, the poetry goes to your head. It's Titian painting his fresco on a wall of mud. Yet there is in Victor Hugo's plays an absence of *heart,* which was never so conspicuous. Victor Hugo is not *true.*

"Victor Hugo is not *true.*" That is the suspicion that constantly trips one up whether one reads his books or his life. In literature, in public life, in private life, he was not only amazing but an amazing humbug. We see evidence of this in the story of his relations with his wife and Juliette Drouet, his mistress, which Madame

Duclaux tells again so fairly and so well. Even while he was pursuing the mistress across France, he would write fervently home to the wife: "Je t'aime! Tu es la joie et l'honneur de ma vie!" Hugo possibly meant this when he wrote it. He may have been lying to himself rather than to his wife. His falseness lay in his readiness to whisper at each shrine at which he worshipped that this was his only shrine. At the same time, no sooner do we admit that Hugo was an impostor in love and in literature than we begin to compare him with other impostors and to note certain differences in him. His early idealism was not merely an idealism of words. He was, until his marriage, as chaste as his nature was passionate. He was after marriage a faithful husband till his wife told him that she could no longer live with him as his wife. After he fell in love with Juliette Drouet in 1833, we might describe him as a high-minded bigamist, though he did not remain perfectly faithful even in his bigamy. One thing, at least, is certain: both women loved him till the end of their long lives. His dying wife wrote to him in 1868: "The end of my dream is to die in your arms." And, when Juliette Drouet was slowly dying of cancer, and both she and Hugo were between seventy and eighty, she still insisted on nursing him at the

hint of the slightest cough or headache. "Did he but stir, she was there with a warm drink or an extra covering. Every morning it was she who drew the curtains from Victor Hugo's window, roused the old man with a kiss on the forehead, lit his fire, prepared the two fresh eggs that formed his breakfast, read him the papers." Had he been all false, he could hardly have preserved the affection of these two rival and devoted women through years of danger and exile till the ultimate triumph of his fame. Madame Duclaux suggests, however, that he was a humbug even on that early occasion on which, seeing that Sainte-Beuve was in love with his wife, and that she in turn was attracted by Sainte-Beuve he offered with romantic generosity to let his wife choose between them and to abide by the result. Again, the fact that he insisted on remaining friends with Sainte-Beuve through the affair is regarded as evidence of his cunning determination to keep in with the reviewers at all costs. Victor Hugo would probably be suspected of having been a humbug, whatever he had done.

His self-importance is a continual challenge to our belief in him. Madame Duclaux quotes Heine's sneer: "Hugo is worse than an egoist, he is a Hugoist," and his device was the arrogant

Ego Hugo. But at least he had the courage of his self-importance. In 1851, at the time of the *coup d'état* of Louis Napoleon, when there was a price on his head, Hugo was driving across Paris to a meeting of the Insurrectionary Committee, and passed a group of officers on horseback:

> The blood rushed to his head. He flung down the window of the cab, tore his deputy's scarf out of his pocket, and waving it wildly, began to harangue the General:
>
> "You, who are there, dressed in the uniform of a General, it is to you that I speak, sir. You know who I am; I am a representative of the nation: and I know who you are; you are a malefactor! And now do you wish to know my name! My name is Victor Hugo!"

This was no doubt theatrical, and both his deeds and his words during the reign of Napoleon the Little were those of a man consciously playing the leading part. But the fact remains that at this crisis he did risk everything and face twenty years' exile for the sake of his convictions. The last stanza of "Ultima Verba" in *Les Châtiments* may be rhetoric, but it is not empty rhetoric:

Si l'on n'est plus que mille, eh bien, j'en suis! Si même
Ils ne sont plus que cent, je brave encor Sylla:

S'il en demeure dix, je serai le dixième;
Et s'il n'en reste qu'un, je serai celui-là.

There is an energy of fury in Hugo's political verse that keeps it alive even to-day, when Louis Napoleon, a charlatan without this redeeming fury, has receded into such littleness that the eye scarcely any longer perceives him. Hugo at times seems a painfully vocative poet—the poet, not merely of the vocative singular, but of the vocative plural. But there is always coursing through his verse a great natural force, like that of the wind or the waves, that carries us along as we read.

Hugo's work, like his life, indeed, was the expression of what Madame Duclaux calls "a powerful and a sensual nature, a prodigious temperament."

> His barber complained that Hugo's beard took the edge off any razor. At forty he cracked the kernels of peaches with his teeth; even in his old age . . . he ate his oranges with the peel on and his lobsters in their shell, "because he found them more digestible." His appetite (which was hungry, not greedy) alarmed the good Théo. "You should see the fabulous medley he makes on his plate of all sorts and conditions of viands: cutlets, a salad of white beans, stewed beef and tomato sauce, and watch him devour them, very fast, and during a long time."

"Hugo is one of the forces of Nature!" cried Flaubert, "and there circulates in his veins the sap of trees."

This Gargantuan appetite expresses itself everywhere in his writings. He was a Gargantua in regard to life as well as food. He devoured the past like the present. He devoured politics, religion, the stage, poetry, fiction, nature, grandchildren. If he was a giant who devoured, however, he was also a giant who created. He may not have the accurate gift of observation on which we set so much store nowadays, and he may depart so far from reality as to call an English sailor in *L'Homme qui rit* Tom-Jim-Jack. But, if he does not create for us a world as real as Clapham Junction, he does create for us a world as real as Æsop's *Fables*. He is an inventor of myths and fables, indeed. He no more attempts to imitate the surface of life than a musician attempts to imitate the sounds of life. Like Dickens, he is a great Gothic writer, who demands the right to people the work of his hands with devil or imp or angel—with figures of pity or horror, of laughter or tears. He does not possess Dickens's comic imagination; the fantastic and the ironic take the place of humour in his books. But his work, like that of Dickens, is a gigantically grotesque pile built on the

ancient Christian affirmation of love. Literature in our time may observe or ask questions: it seldom affirms. But I doubt whether it even observes the essential heart of things with as sure an eye as that of Hugo or Dickens. It does not penetrate with its pity to that underworld of pain in which Cosette and Smike grow up, starved and loveless. Hugo and Dickens were at least rescuers. They were not mere sentimentalists: they had the imaginative sympathy that would not let them rest in the presence of the miseries of life. They hated the tyranny of men and the tyranny of institutions; they hated greed and cruelty, and the iron door shut on children and on the helpless and the suffering.

Hugo has dramatised this imaginative sympathy and hatred in novels so mythical in substance that one might easily fall into the mistake of regarding them as false. We must think of Jean Valjean and Javert as figures in a morality play rather than in a psychological study if we are to appreciate the greatness of *Les Misérables*. They were created, not by God, but by Victor Hugo. But, if they have not at all points psychological reality, they have at least legendary reality. We can say the same of the characters in *Les Travailleurs de la mer and L'Homme qui rit*. They all inhabit the world, not as it

actually is, but as it is transmuted in a legendary imagination. Unfortunately, Hugo professes to write about real people and not about dragons, and we constantly find ourselves applying psychological tests as we read him. When Gilliatt drowns himself in *Les Travailleurs de la mer* we complain not only of the dubious psychology but of the mechanical theatrical effect. Victor Hugo, we feel at such moments, was a great "producer" rather than a great artist. He would, undoubtedly, had he lived, have taken full advantage of the over-emphasis of the cinema. On the other hand, the over-emphasis of which his critics complain is not the over-emphasis of weakness straining after strength. It is rather an overflow of the Gothic imagination. "His flat foot," he tells us, of a certain character, "was a vulture's claw. His skull was low at the top and large about the temples. His ugly ears bristled with hair, and seemed to say: 'Beware of speaking to the animal in this cave.'" His style is essentially the exaggerated style. His genius is the genius of exaggeration. Luckily, he exaggerates, not wholly in clouds, but in carved gnomes and all manner of fantastic detail. He omits not a comma from his dreams and nightmares. That is why his short sentences and paragraphs still startle us into attention when we open one of his

novels. His imagination at least teems on every page—teems with absurdities, perhaps, as well as with truth and beauty, but teems always with interest. Madame Duclaux's excellent biography should send many readers back to the work of this magnificent and preposterous legend-maker and lover of his fellow-men.

III

MOLIÈRE

The way of entertainers is hard. It is a good enough world for those who entertain us no higher than the ribs, but to attempt to entertain the mind is another matter. Comedy shows men and women (among other things) what humbugs they are, and, as the greatest humbugs are often persons of influence, the comic writer is naturally hated and disparaged during his lifetime in some of the most powerful circles. That Molière's body was at first refused Christian burial may have been due to the fact that he was an actor—in theory, an actor was not allowed even to receive the Sacrament in those days unless he had renounced his profession—but his profession of comic writer had during the latter part of his life brought him into far worse disrepute than his profession of comic actor. He was the greatest portrayer of those companion figures, the impostor and the dupe, who ever lived, and, as a result, every kind of impostor and dupe, whether

religious, literary, or fashionable, was enraged against him. That Molière was a successful author is not disputed, but he never enjoyed a calm and unchallenged success. He had the support of Louis XIV and the public, but the orthodox, the professional and the highbrow lost no opportunity of doing him an injury.

Molière was nearly forty-two when he produced *L'École des Femmes.* He had already, as Mr. Tilley tells us, in his solidly instructive study, "become an assured favourite with the public," though *Les Précieuses ridicules* had given offence in the salons, and performances were suspended for a time. With the appearance of *L'École des Femmes* he at length stood forth a great writer, and the critics began to take counsel together. A ten months' war followed, in the course of which he delivered two smashing blows against his enemies, first in *La Critique de l'École des Femmes* and *L'Impromptu de Versailles.* Then "on May 12, 1664, he presented at Versailles the first three acts of Tartuffe." This began a new war which lasted, not merely ten months, but five years. It was not until 1669 that Molière received permission to produce in public the five-act play that we now know. The violence of the storm the play raised may be gauged from the quotation Mr.

Tilley makes from Pierre Roullé's pamphlet, in which Roullé called Molière "un démon vêtu de chair et habillé en homme, un libertin, un impie digne d'un supplice exemplaire." Mr. Shaw himself never made people angrier than Molière. Having held a religious hypocrite up to ridicule, Molière went on to paint a comic portrait of a freethinker. He gave the world *Dom Juan,* which was a great success—for a week or two. Suddenly, it was withdrawn, and Molière never produced it again. Nor did he publish it. It had apparently offended not only the clergy but the great nobles, who disliked the exposure of a gentleman on his way to Hell.

It was, we may presume, these cumulative misfortunes that drove him into the pessimistic mood out of which *Le Misanthrope* was born. He had now written three masterpieces for the purpose of entertaining his fellows, and he was being treated, not as a public benefactor, but as a public enemy. One of the three had been calumniated; one was prohibited; the third had to be withdrawn. And, in addition to being at odds with the world, he was at odds with his wife. He had married her, a girl under twenty, when he himself was forty, and she apparently remained a coquette after marriage. One could not ask for clearer evidence of the sanity of

Molière's genius than the fact that he was able to make of his bitter private and public quarrels one of the most delightful comedies in literature. Alceste, it is true, with his desire to quit the insincere and fashionable world and to retire into the simple and secluded life, is said to be a study, not of Molière himself, but of a misanthropic nobleman. But, though Molière may have borrowed a few features of the nobleman's story, he undoubtedly lent the nobleman the soul of Molière. He had the comic vision of himself as well as of the rest of humanity. He might mock the vices of the world, but he could also mock himself for hating the world, in the spirit of a superior person, on account of its vices. He could even, as a poet, see his wife's point of view, though he might quarrel with her as a husband. Célimène, that witty and beautiful lady who refuses to retire with Alceste into his misanthropic solitude, has had all the world in love with her ever since. Molière, we may be sure, sympathised with her when she protested:

La solitude effraye une âme de vingt ans.

Molière himself played the part of Alceste, and his wife played Célimène. The play, we are told, was not one of his greatest popular successes. As one reads it, indeed, one is puzzled at times as

to why it should be giving one such exquisite enjoyment. There is less action in it than in any other great play. The plot never thickens, and the fall of the curtain leaves us with nothing settled as to Alceste's and Célimène's future. To write a comedy which is not very comic and a drama which is not very dramatic, and to make of this a masterpiece of comic drama, is surely one of the most remarkable of achievements. It can only be explained by the fact that Molière was a great creator and not a great mechanician. He gives the secret of life to his people. His success in doing this is shown by the way in which men have argued about them ever since, as we argue about real men and women. There are even critics who are unable to laugh at Molière, so overwhelming is the reality of his characters. Mr. Tilley quotes M. Donnay as saying, "Aujourd'hui nous ne rions pas de Tartuffe ni même d'Orgon"; and even Mr. Tilley himself, discussing *Le Malade imaginaire,* says that we realise that Argan—Argan of the enemas—is "at bottom a tragic figure." Again, he sees a "tragic element" in the characterisation of Harpagon in *L'Avare,* and, speaking of Alceste in *Le Misanthrope,* he observes that, "though we may be sure that [Molière] fully realised the tragic side of his

character, it was not this aspect that he wished to present to the public." It seems to me that there is a good deal of unreality in all this. It is as though the errors of men were too serious things to laugh at—as though comedy had not its own terrible wisdom and must not venture into the depths of reality. Molière would probably have had a short way with those who cannot laugh at *Tartuffe,* as Cervantes would have had a short way with those who cannot laugh at *Don Quixote.* There is as much imagination—as much sympathy, even, perhaps—in the laughter of the great comic writers as in the tears of the sentimentalist. And Molière's aim was laughter achieved through an exaggerated imitation of reality. He was the poet of good sense, and he felt that he had but to hold up the mirror of good sense in order that we might see how absurd is every form of egotism and pretentiousness. He took the side of the simple dignity of human nature against all the narrowing vices, the anti-social vices, whether of avarice, licentiousness, self-righteousness or preciosity. He has written the smiling poetry of our sins. Not that he is indulgent to them, like Anatole France, whose view of life is sentimental. Molière's work was a declaration of war against all those human beings who are more pleased with themselves

than they ought to be, down to that amazing coterie of literary ladies in *Les Femmes savantes,* concerning whose projected academy of taste one of them announces in almost modern accents:

> Nous serons par nos lois les juges des ouvrages;
> Par nos lois, prose et vers, tout nous sera soumis;
> Nul n'aura de l'esprit hors nous et nos amis;
> Nous chercherons partout à trouver à redire,
> Et ne verrons que nous qui sache bien écrire.

Molière has been accused of writing an attack on the higher education of women in *Les Femmes savantes.* What we see in it to-day is an immortal picture of those intellectual impostors of the drawing-room—the not-very-intelligentsia, as they have been wittily called—who exist in every civilised capital and in every generation. The vanities of the rival poets, it is true, are caricatured rather extravagantly, but the caricature is essentially true to life. This is what men and women are like. At least, this is what they are like when they are most exclusive and most satisfied with themselves. Molière knew human nature. That is what makes him so much greater a comic dramatist than any English dramatist who has written since Shakespeare.

Molière has been taken to task by many critics since his death. He has been accused even of

writing badly. He has been accused of padding, incorrectness, and the use of jargon. He has been told that he should have written none of his plays in verse, but all of them, as he wrote *L'Avare,* in prose. All these criticisms are nine-tenths fatuous. Molière by the use of verse gave comic speech the exhilaration of a game, as Pope did, and literature that has exhilarating qualities of this kind has justified its existence, whether or not it squares with some hard-and-fast theory of poetry. If we cannot define poetry so as to leave room for Molière and Pope, then so much the worse for our definition of poetry. As for padding, I doubt whether any dramatist has ever kept the breath of life in his speech more continuously than Molière. His dialogue is not a flowing tap but a running stream. That Molière's language may be faulty I will not dispute, as French is an alien and but half-known tongue to me. He produces his effects, whatever his grammar. He has created for us a world, delicious even in its insincerities and absurdities—a world seen through charming, humorous, generous, remorseless eyes—a world held together by wit—a world in which the sins of society dance to the ravishing music of the alexandrine.

IV

EDMUND BURKE

Burke, we are told, was known as "the dinner-bell" because the House of Commons emptied when he rose to speak. This is usually put down to the uncouthness of his delivery. But, after all, there was nothing in his delivery to prevent his indictment of Warren Hastings from so affecting his hearers in places that, as Lord Morley writes, "every listener, including the great criminal, held his breath in an agony of horror," and "women were carried out fainting." I fancy Burke's virtues rather than his vices were at the bottom of his failure in the House of Commons. He took the imagination of an artist into politics, and he soared high above the questions of the hour among eternal principles of human nature in which country gentlemen had only a very faint interest. Not that he was a theoretical speaker in the sense of being a doctrinaire. He had no belief in paper Utopias. His object in politics was not to construct an ideal society out of his

head but to construct an acceptable society out of human beings as their traditions, their environment, and their needs have moulded them. He never forgot that actual human beings are the material in which the politician must work. His constant and passionate sense of human nature is what puts his speeches far above any others that have been delivered in English. Even when he spoke or wrote on the wrong side, he was often right about human nature. Page after page of his *Reflections on the French Revolution* is as right about human nature as it is wrong about its ostensible subject. One might say with truth that, whatever his ostensible subject may be, Burke's real subject is always human nature.

If he was indignant against wrong in America or India or Ireland, it was not with the indignation of a sentimentalist so much as of a moralist outraged by the degradation of human nature. He loved disinterestedness and wisdom in public affairs, and he mourned over the absence of them as a Shakespeare might have mourned over the absence of noble characters about whom to write plays. In his great *Speech at Bristol* he pilloried that narrow and selfish conception of freedom according to which freedom consists in the right to dominate over others. Burke demanded of

human nature not an impossible perfection but at least the first beginnings of magnanimity. Thus he loathed every form of mean domination, whether it revealed itself as religious persecution or political repression. He attacked both the anti-Catholic and the anti-American would-be despots in the *Speech at Bristol,* and his comment may serve for almost any "anti" in any age:

> It is but too true that the love, and even the very idea, of genuine liberty is extremely rare. It is but too true that there are many whose whole scheme of freedom is made up of pride, perverseness and insolence. They feel themselves in a state of thraldom, they imagine that their souls are cooped and cabined in, unless they have some man, or some body of men, dependent on their mercy. This desire of having some one below them descends to those who are the very lowest of all; and a Protestant cobbler, debased by his poverty, but exalted by his share of the ruling Church, feels a pride in knowing it is by his generosity alone that the peer, whose footman's instep he measures, is able to keep his chaplain from a jail. This disposition is the true source of the passion which many men in very humble life have taken to the American War. *Our* subjects in America, *our* colonies, *our* dependants. This lust of party-power is the liberty they hunger and thirst for; and this syren song of ambition has charmed ears that one would have thought were never organised to that sort of music.

All through his life Burke set his face against what may be called the lusts of human nature.

As a Member of Parliament he refused to curry favour with his constituents by gratifying their baser appetites. In the farewell speech from which I have quoted, he has left us an impassioned statement of his position:

> No man carries farther than I do the policy of making government pleasing to the people. But the widest range of this politic complaisance is confined within the limits of justice. I would not only consult the interest of the people, but I would cheerfully gratify their humours. We are all a sort of children that must be soothed and managed. I think I am not austere or formal in my nature. I would bear, I would even myself play part in, any innocent buffooneries to divert them. But I will never act the tyrant for their amusement. If they will mix malice in their sports, I shall never consent to throw them any living, sentient creature whatsoever—no, not so much as a kitling—to torment.

Burke spent the greater part of his life summoning men to the discipline of duty and away from anarchic graspings after rights. George III's war against America, as well as the French Revolution is the assertion of a "right," and Burke's hatred of the war, as of the Revolution, arose from his belief that the assertion of "rights," not for great public ends, but from ill-tempered obstinacy in clinging to a theory, was no likely means of increasing the happiness and liberties

of human beings. He once received a letter from a gentleman who declared that, even if the assertion of her right to tax America meant the ruin of England, he would nevertheless say "Let her perish!" All through the American War Burke saw that what prevented peace was this sort of doctrinaire theory of the rights of England. In 1775 the American Congress appointed a deputation to lay a petition before the House of Commons. The Cabinet refused to receive an "illegal" body. Penn brought over an "olive branch of peace" from Congress in the same year, and again, holding fast to their theory of the rights of Empire, ministers replied that Congress was an illegal body. Burke saw the vital thing to decide between England and America was not some metaphysical point in the disputed question of rights, but the means by which two groups of human beings could learn to live in peace and charity in the same world. I do not wish to suggest that he cared nothing for the rights or wrongs of the quarrel. He was the impassioned champion of right, in the noble sense of the word, beyond any other statesman of his time. On the other hand, he detested the assertion of a right for its own sake—the politics born of the theory that one has the right (whether one is a man or a nation) to do what one likes

with one's own. Burke saw that this is the humour of children quarrelling in the nursery. "The question with me is," he said, "not whether you have a right to render your people miserable, but whether it is not your interest to make them happy." He regarded peace as almost an end in itself, and he besought his fellow-countrymen not to stand upon their rights at the cost of making peace impossible. "Whether liberty be advantageous or not," he told them during the war, "(for I know it is a fashion to decry the very principle), none will dispute that peace is a blessing; and peace must in the course of human affairs be frequently bought by some indulgence of liberty." Thus we find him all through the war reminding his fellow-countrymen that the Americans were human beings—a fact of a kind that is always forgotten in time of war—and that the Anglo-American problem was chiefly a problem in human nature. "Nobody shall persuade me," he declared, drawing on his knowledge of human nature, "when a whole people are concerned, that acts of lenity are not means of conciliation." Again, when he was told that America was worth fighting for, his reply was: "Certainly it is, if fighting a people be the best way of gaining them." Though opposed to the separation of America, he was in the end con-

vinced that, if the alternatives were separation and coercion, England was more likely to gain a separate America than a bludgeoned America as a friend. Addressing his former constituents, he said:

> I parted with it as with a limb, but as a limb to save the body; and I would have parted with more if more had been necessary: anything rather than a fruitless, hopeless, unnatural civil war. This mode of yielding would, it is said, give way to independency without a war. I am persuaded from the nature of things, and from every information, that it would have had a directly contrary effect. But if it had this effect, I confess that I should prefer independency without war to independency with it; and I have so much trust in the inclinations and prejudices of mankind, and so little in anything else, that I should expect ten times more benefit to this kingdom from the affection of America, though under a separate establishment, than from her perfect submission to the Crown and Parliament, accompanied with her terror, disgust and abhorrence. Bodies tied together by so unnatural a bond of union as mutual hatred are only converted to their ruin.

There, again, you see the appeal to the "nature of things," the use of the imagination instead of blind partisan passion. He himself might have called this distinguishing quality not imagination so much as a capacity to take long views. He looked on the taking of long views as itself a

primary virtue in politics. He praised Cromwell and other statesmen whom he regarded as great bad men because "they had long views, and sanctified their ambition by aiming at the orderly rule, and not the destruction of their country." Who, reading to-day his speeches on America and India, can question that Burke himself possessed the genius of the long view, which is only another name for imagination in politics?

Mr. Murison's admirable student's edition of some of the writings of Burke gives us examples of Burke not only during the American but during the French period. He has called his book, indeed, not after the *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol* or the *Speech at Bristol,* but after the *Letter to a Noble Lord,* in which Burke defends himself in the French period against the Duke of Bedford. Here, as during the American War, we find him protesting against the introduction of "metaphysical" disputes about rights into politics. During the American War he had said, in regard to the question of rights: "I do not enter into these metaphysical distinctions. I hate the very sound of them." Now, during the Revolution, he declared: "Nothing can be conceived more hard than the heart of a thoroughbred metaphysician. It comes nearer to the cold malignity of a wicked spirit than to the frailty

and passion of man." Unfortunately, Burke himself was something of a "metaphysician" in his attack on the French Revolution. He wrote against France from prejudice and from theory, and his eye is continually distracted from the facts of human nature to a paper political orthodoxy. Even here, however, he did not forget human nature, and, in so far as the French Revolution was false to human nature—if the phrase is permissible—Burke has told the truth in lasting prose.

His greatness as an artist is shown by the fact that he can move us to silent admiration even when we disagree with him. There is plenty of dull matter in most of his writings, since much of them is necessarily occupied with the detail of dead controversies, but there is a tide of eloquence that continually returns into his sentences and carries us off our feet. We never get to love him as a man. We do not know him personally as we know Johnson. He is a voice, a figure, not one of ourselves. His eloquence is the eloquence of wisdom, seldom of personal intimacy. He is not a master of tears and laughter, but, like Milton, seems rather to represent a sort of impassioned dignity of human nature. But what an imagination he poured into the public affairs of his time—an imagination to which his

time was all but indifferent until he used his eloquence in support of (in Lord Morley's phrase) "the great army of the indolent good, the people who lead excellent lives and never use their reason." Even then, however, the imagination survived, and, hackneyed though it is by quotation, one never grows weary of coming on that great passage in which he mourns over the fate of Marie Antoinette and the passing of the age of chivalry from Europe.

> It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw the Queen of France, then the Dauphiness, at Versailles; and surely never lighted on this orb, which she hardly seemed to touch, a more delightful vision. I saw her just above the horizon, decorating and cheering the elevated sphere she just began to move in; glittering like the morning star, full of life, and splendour, and joy. Oh, what a revolution! and what a heart must I have to contemplate without emotion that elevation and that fall! Little did I dream when she added titles of veneration to those of enthusiastic, distant, respectful love, that she should ever be obliged to carry the sharp antidote against disgrace concealed in that bosom; little did I dream that I should have lived to see such disasters fallen upon her in a nation of gallant men, in a nation of men of honour and of cavaliers. I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult. But the age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists and calculators has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished

> for ever. Never, never more, shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom. The unbought grace of life, the cheap defence of nations, the nurse of manly sentiments and heroic enterprise is gone! It is gone, that sensibility of principle, that chastity of honour, which felt a stain like a wound, which inspired courage whilst it mitigated ferocity, which ennobled whatever it touched, and under which vice itself lost half its evil by losing all its grossness.

As we read these sentences we cease to ask ourselves whether Burke was on the right or the wrong side in the French Revolution. We are content that a great artist has spoken from the depths of his soul. He has released the truth that is in him to the eternal enrichment of the human race.

V

KEATS

1. THE VARIOUS KEATSES

Most men who write in praise of Shakespeare write in praise of themselves. Shakespeare is their mirror. Respectable middle-aged professors generally think of him as the respectable middle-aged man of the Stratford bust. Mr. Frank Harris sees him as Mr. Frank Harris with a difference. Mr. Charles Whibley imagines him as a Whibleyesque Tory with a knotted whip ever ready for the back of democracy. After reading *The John Keats Memorial Volume,* consisting of appreciations in prose and verse from all manner of contributors, great and little, one comes to the conclusion that most men interpret Keats in the same easy-going way. Thus, Mr. Bernard Shaw notes that the poet of the *Ode to a Nightingale* and the *Ode on Melancholy* was "a merry soul, a jolly fellow, who could not only carry his splendid burthen of genius, but swing it round, toss it up and catch it again, and whistle

a tune as he strode along," and he discovers in three verses of *The Pot of Basil* "the immense indictment of the profiteers and exploiters with which Marx has shaken capitalistic civilisation to its foundations, even to its overthrow in Russia." To Dr. Arthur Lynch, on the other hand, Keats is primarily a philosopher, whose philosophic principles "account for his Republicanism as well as for his criticisms of poetry." Mr. Arthur Symons takes an opposite view. "John Keats," he tells us, "at a time when the phrase had not yet been invented, practised the theory of art for art's sake. . . . Keats had something feminine and twisted in his mind, made up out of unhealthy nerves . . . which it is now the fashion to call decadent." To Sir Ian Hamilton (who contributes a beautiful comment, saved by its passion from the perils of high-flownness) Keats was the prototype of the heroic youth that sacrificed itself in the war. Did he not once declare his willingness to "jump down Etna for any great public good"; and did he not write:

> The Patriot shall feel
> My stern alarum and unsheath his steel?

And, if we dip into the thousands of other things that have been written about Keats, including the centenary appreciations, we shall find this

personal emphasis on the part of the critic again and again.

Lord Houghton even did his best to raise Keats a step nearer in the social scale by associating him with "the upper rank of the middle class"—an exaggeration, however, which is no more inaccurate than the common view that Keats was brought up on the verge of pauperdom. As a matter of fact, Keats's father was an ostler who married his employer's daughter, and his grandfather, the livery stable keeper of Finsbury Pavement, left a fortune of £13,000. But it is not only with regard to his birth that attempts to bring Keats into the fold of respectability are common. His character, and the character of his genius, are unconsciously doctored to suit the tastes of those who do not apparently care for Keats as he actually was. The Keats who thrashed the butcher is more important for them than the Keats who fell in love with Fanny Brawne. They prefer canonising Keats to knowing him, and the logical consequence of their attitude is that the Keats who might have been means more to them than the Keats who was. I do not deny that a great deal that is said about Keats on all sides is true: possibly most of it is true. But much of it is true only as an argument. The manly Keats is the true

answer to the effeminate Keats, as the effeminate Keats is the true answer to the manly Keats. The Keats who said: "I think I shall be among the English poets after my death," and the Keats who was "snuffed out by an article" similarly answer one another; and the Keats of *The Fall of Hyperion* is the perfect critic of the Keats of the *Ode on Indolence,* and *vice versa.* Keats was a score of Keatses. He was luxurious and ascetic, heroic and self-indulgent, ambitious and diffident, an artist and a thinker, vulgar and an æsthete, perfect in phrase and gauche in phrase, melancholy and merry, sensual and spiritual, a cynic about women and one of the great lovers, a teller of heart-easing tales and a would-be redeemer. The perfect portrait of Keats will reveal him in all these contradictory lights, and we shall never understand Keats if we merely isolate one group of facts, such as the thrashing of the butcher, or another group, such as that he thought for a moment of abandoning *Hyperion* as a result of the hostile reviews of *Endymion.* Keats's life was not that of a planet beautifully poised as it wheels on its lonely errand. He was a man torn by conflicting demons—a marytr to poetry and love and, ultimately, to ideals of truth and goodness.

He bowed before altars that, even when he

bowed, he seems to have known were altars of the lesser gods. Not that he blasphemed the greater gods in doing so. He believed that the altar at the foot of the hill was a stage in the poet's progress to the altar at the summit. As he grew older, however, his vision of the summit became more intense, and a greater Muse announced to him:

> None can usurp this height
> But those to whom the miseries of the world
> Are miseries and will not let them rest.

He was exchanging the worship of Apollo for the worship of Zeus and, like Tolstoy, he seemed to condemn his own past work as a denial of the genius of true art. Even here, however, Keats was still tortured by conflicting allegiances, and it is on Apollo, not on Zeus, he calls in his condemnation of Byron in *The Fall of Hyperion:*

> Apollo! faded! O far-flown Apollo!
> Where is thy misty pestilence to creep
> Into the dwellings, through the door crannies
> Of all mock lyrists, large self-worshippers
> And careless Hectorers in proud bad verse?
> Though I breathe death with them it will be life
> To see them sprawl before me into graves.

But he was Zeus's child, as he lay dying, and the very epitaph he left for himself, remembering a phrase in *The Maid's Tragedy* of Beaumont and

Fletcher, "Here lies one whose name is writ in water," was a last farewell to an Apollo who seemed to have failed him.

The Keats who achieved perfection in literature, however, was Apollo's Keats—Apollo's and Aphrodite's. His odes, written out of a genius stirred to its depths for the first time by his passion for Fanny Brawne—he does not seem to have been subject to love, as most poets are, in his boyhood—were but the perfect expression of that idolatry that had stammered in *Endymion.* Keats in his masterpieces is still the Prince breaking through the wood to the vision of the Sleeping Beauty. He has not yet touched her into life. He almost prefers to remain a spectator, not an awakener. He loves the picture itself more than the reality, though he guesses all the while at the reality behind. That, perhaps, is why men do not go to Keats for healing, as they go to Wordsworth, or for hope, as they go to Shelley. Keats enriches life rather with a sense of a loveliness for ever vanishing, and with a dream of what life might be if the loveliness remained. Regret means more to him than hope:

> Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
> To what green altar, O mysterious priest,

> Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
> And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
> What little town by river or sea-shore,
> Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
> Is emptied of its folk, this pious morn?
> And, little town, thy streets for evermore
> Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
> Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

The world at its most beautiful is for Keats a series of dissolving pictures—of "fair attitudes" that only the artist can make immortal. His indolence is the indolence of a man under the spell of beautiful shapes. His energy is the energy of a man who would drain the whole cup of worship in a beautiful phrase. His æsthetic attitude to life—as æsthetic in its way as the early Pater's—appears in that letter in which he writes:

> I go among the Fields and catch a glimpse of a Stoat or a field-mouse peeping out of the withered grass—the creature hath a purpose, and its eyes are bright with it. I go amongst the buildings of a city, and I see a Man hurrying along—to what? The Creature has a purpose, and his eyes are bright with it.

In this very letter, no doubt, the disinterested philosopher as well as the æsthete speaks, but it is Keats's longing for philosophy, not his philosophy itself, that touches us most profoundly

in his greatest work. Our knowledge of his sufferings gives his work a background of

> Sorrow more beautiful than Beauty's self

against which the exquisite images he wrought have a tragic and spiritual appeal beyond that of any other poet of his kind. The Keats we love is more than the Keats of the poems—more even than the Keats of the letters. It is the Keats of these and of the life—that proud and vehement spirit, that great-hearted traveller in the realms of gold, caught in circumstances and done to death in the very temples where he had worshipped.

2. THE ARTIFICER

It is an interesting fact that most of the writers who use words like artificers have been townsmen. Milton and Gray, Keats and Lamb, were all Londoners. It is as though to some extent words took the place of natural scenes in the development of the townsman's genius. The town boy finds the Muse in a book rather than by a stream. He hears her voice first, perhaps, in a beautiful phrase. It would be ridiculous to speak as though the country-bred poet were uninfluenced by books or the town-bred poet uninfluenced by

bird and tree, by winds and waters. All I suggest is that in the townsman the influence of literature is more dominant, and frequently leads to an excitement over phrases almost more intense than his excitement over things.

Milton was thus a stylist in a sense in which Shakespeare was not. Keats was a stylist in a sense in which Shelley was not. Not that Milton and Keats used speech more felicitously, but they used it more self-consciously. Theirs, at their greatest, was the magic of art rather than of nature. They had not, in the same measure as Shakespeare and Shelley, the freedom of the air—the bird-like flight or the bird-like song.

The genius of Keats, we know, was founded on the reading of books. He did not even begin writing till he was nearly eighteen, when Cowden Clarke lent him the treasures of his library, including *The Faëry Queene*. The first of his great poems was written after reading Chapman's *Homer,* and to the end of his life he was inspired by works of art to a greater degree than any other writer of genius in the England of his time.

This may help to explain why he was, as Mr. John Bailey has pointed out, the poet of stillness. Books, pictures, and Grecian urns are still. They fix life for us in the wonder of a trance, and, if

Keats saw Cortes "silent upon a peak in Darien," and

> grey-haired Saturn, quiet as a stone,
> Still as the silence round about his lair;

and figure after figure in the same sculptured stillness, may this not have been due to the fact that his genius fed so largely on the arts?

Keats, however, was the poet of trance, even apart from his stay in the trance-world of the artists. One of his characteristic moods was an ecstatic indolence, like that of a man who has tasted an enchanted herb. He was a poet, indeed, whose soul escaped in song as on the drowsy wings of a dream. He may be said to have turned from the fever of life to the intoxication of poetry. He loved poetry—"my demon poesy"—as a thing in itself, as, perhaps, no other poet equally great has done. This was his quest: this was his Paradise. He prayed, indeed:

> That I may die a death
> Of luxury, and my young spirit follow
> The morning sunbeams to the great Apollo
> Like a fresh sacrifice; or, if I can bear
> The o'erwhelming sweets, 'twill bring me to the fair
> Visions of all places: a bowery nook
> Will be elysium—an eternal book

Whence I may copy many a lovely saying
About the leaves and flowers—about the playing
Of nymphs in woods, and fountains; and the shade
Keeping a silence round a sleeping maid.

This was the mood in which he wrote his greatest work. At the same time Keats was not an unmixed æsthete. He recognised from the first, as we see in this early poem, "Sleep and Poetry," that the true field of poetry is not the joys of the senses, but the whole of human life:

And can I ever bid these joys farewell?
Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life,
Where I may find the agonies, the strife
Of human hearts.

Modern critics, reading these lines, are tempted to disparage the work Keats actually accomplished in comparison with the work that he might have accomplished, had he not died at twenty-five. They prefer "The Fall of Hyperion," that he might have written, to "The Eve of St. Agnes," the "Nightingale," and the "Grecian Urn" that he did write. They love the potential middle-aged Keats more than the perfect youthful Keats.

This seems to me a perversity, but the criticism has value in reminding us how rich and deep was the nature that expressed itself in the work even

of the young Keats. Keats was an æsthete, but he was always something more. He was a man continually stirred by a divine hunger for things never to be attained by the ecstasies of youth—for knowledge, for truth, for something that might heal the sorrows of men. His nature was continually at war with itself. His being was in tumult, even though his genius found its perfect hour in stillness.

But it was the tumult of love, not the tumult of noble ideals, that led to the production of his greatest work. Fanny Brawne, that beautiful minx in her teens, is denounced for having murdered Keats; but she certainly did not murder his genius. It was after meeting her that he wrote the Odes and "The Eve of St. Agnes," and "Lamia" and "La Belle Dame Sans Merci." There has been too much cursing of Fanny. She may have been the cause of Keats's greatest agony, but she was also the cause of his greatest ecstasy. The world is in Fanny's debt, as Keats was. It was Fanny's Keats, in a very real sense, who wrote the immortal verse that all the world now honours.

3. FANNY BRAWNE

"My dear Brown," wrote the dying Keats, with Fanny Brawne in his thoughts, in almost

the last of his surviving letters, "for my sake, be her advocate for ever." "You think she has many faults," he had written a month earlier, when leaving England; "but, for my sake, think she has none." Thus did Keats bequeath the perfect image of Fanny Brawne to his friend. And the bequest is not only to his friend but to posterity. We, too, must study her image in the eyes of Keats, and hang the portrait of the lady who had no faults in at least as good a position on the wall with those other portraits of the flawed lady—the minx, the flirt, the siren, the destroyer.

Sir Sidney Colvin, in his noble and monumental biography of Keats, found no room for this idealised portrait. He was scrupulously fair to Fanny Brawne as a woman, but he condemned her as the woman with whom Keats happened to fall in love. To Sir Sidney she was not Keats's goddess, but Keats's demon. Criticising the book on its first appearance, I pointed out that almost everything that is immortal in the poetry of Keats was written when he was under the influence of his passion for Fanny Brawne, and I urged that, had it not been for the ploughing and harrowing of love, we should probably never have had the rich harvest of his genius. Sir Sidney has now added a few pages to his preface,

in which he replies to this criticism, and declares that to write of Fanny Brawne in such a manner is "to misunderstand Keats's whole career." He admits that "most of Keats's best work was done after he had met Fanny Brawne," but it was done, he insists, "not because of her, but in spite of her." "At the hour when his genius was naturally and splendidly ripening of itself," he writes, "she brought into his life an element of distracting unrest, of mingled pleasure and torment, to use his own words, but of torment far more than of pleasure. . . . In writing to her or about her he never for a moment suggests that he owed to her any of his inspiration as a poet. . . . In point of fact, from the hour when he passed under her spell he could never do any long or sustained work except in absence from her." Now all this means little more than that Fanny Brawne made Keats suffer. On that point everybody is agreed. The only matter in dispute is whether this suffering was a source of energy or of destruction to Keats's genius.

Keats has left us in one of his letters his own view of the part suffering plays in the making of a soul. Scoffing at the conception of the world as a "vale of tears," he urges that we should regard it instead as "the vale of soul-making," and asks: "Do you not see how necessary a world of pain

and troubles is to school an intelligence and make it a soul?" Thus, according to his own philosophy, there is no essential contradiction between a love that harrows and a love that enriches. As for his never having suggested that he owed any of his inspiration to his love for Fanny, he may not have done this in so many words, but he makes it clear enough that she stirred his nature to the depths for the first time and awakened in him that fiery energy which is one of the first conditions of genius in poetry. "I cannot think of you," he wrote, "without some sort of energy—though *mal à propos*. Even as I leave off, it seems to me that a few more moments' thought of you would uncrystallise and dissolve me. I must not give way to it—but turn to my writing again—if I fail I shall die hard. O my love, your lips are growing sweet again to my fancy—I must forget them." Sir Sidney would read this letter as a confession that love and genius were at enmity in Keats. It seems to me a much more reasonable view that in the heat of conflict Keats's genius became doubly intense, and that, had there been no struggle, there would have been no triumph. It is not necessary to believe that Fanny Brawne was the ideal woman for Keats to have loved: the point is that his love of her was the supreme event in his life. "I

never," he told her, "felt my mind repose upon anything with complete and undistracted enjoyment—upon no person but you." "I have been astonished," he wrote in another letter, "that men could die martyrs for religion—I have shuddered at it. I shudder no more—I could be martyr'd for my religion—love is my religion—I could die for that. I could die for you. My creed is love, and you are its only tenet." And still earlier he had written: "I have two luxuries to brood over in my walks—your loveliness and the hour of my death. O, that I could have possession of them both in the same minute. . . . I will imagine you Venus to-night and pray, pray, pray to your star like a heathen." It is out of emotional travail such as we find in these letters that poetry is born. Is it possible to believe that, if Keats had never fallen in love—and he had never been in love till he met Fanny—he would have been the great poet we know?

I hold that it is not. Hence I still maintain the truth of the statement which Sir Sidney Colvin sets out to controvert, that, while Fanny "may have been the bad fairy of Keats as a man, she was his good fairy as a poet."

Keats's misfortune in love was a personal misfortune, not a misfortune to his genius. He was too poor to marry, and, in his own phrase, he

"trembled at domestic cares." He was ill and morbid: he had longed for the hour of his death before ever he set eyes on Fanny. Add to this that he was young and sensual and as jealous as Othello. His own nature had in it all the elements of tragic suffering, even if Fanny had been as perfect as St. Cecilia. And she was no St. Cecilia. He had called her "minx" shortly after their first meeting in the autumn of 1818, and described her as "beautiful and elegant, graceful, silly, fashionable and strange." Even then, however, he was in love with her. "The very first week I knew you," he told her afterwards, "I wrote myself your vassal. . . . If you should ever feel for man at the first sight what I did for you, I am lost." It is clear from this that his heart and his head quarrelled about Fanny. At the same time, after those first censures, he never spoke critically of her again, even to his most intimate friends. Some of his friends evidently disliked Fanny and wished to separate the lovers. He refers to this in a letter in which he speaks angrily of "these laughers who do not like you, who envy you for your beauty," and writes of himself as "one who, if he never should see you again, would make you the saint of his memory." But Keats himself could not be certain that she was a saint. "My greatest tor-

ment since I have known you," he tells her, "has been the fear of you being a little inclined to the Cressid." He is so jealous that, when he is ill, he tells her that she must not even go into town alone till he is well again, and says: "If you would really what is called enjoy yourself at a party—if you can smile in people's faces, and wish them to admire you *now*—you never have nor ever will love me." But he adds a postscript: "No, my sweet Fanny—I am wrong—I do not wish you to be unhappy—and yet I do, I must while there is so sweet a beauty—my loveliest, my darling! Good-bye! I kiss you—O the torments!" In a later letter he returns to his jealousy, and declares: "Hamlet's heart was full of such misery as mine is when he said to Ophelia, 'Go to a nunnery, go, go!' " He tells this fragile little worldly creature that she should be prepared to suffer on the rack for him, accuses her of flirting with Brown, and, in one of the most painful of his letters, cries out:

> I appeal to you by the blood of that Christ you believe in: Do not write to me if you have done anything this month which it would have pained me to have seen. You may have altered—if you have not—if you still believe in dancing rooms and other societies as I have seen you—I do not want to live—if you have done so I wish the coming night may be my last. I cannot

> live without you, and not only you, but *chaste you, virtuous you.* . . . Be serious! Love is not a plaything—and again do not write unless you can do it with a crystal conscience.

Poor Keats! Poor Fanny! That Fanny loved Keats is obvious. In this at least she showed herself unworldly. She cannot have been dazzled by his fame, for at that time he was to all appearance merely a minor poet who had been laughed at. He was of humble birth, and he had not even the prospect of being able to earn a living. Add to this that he was an all but chronic invalid. Her love must, in the circumstances, have been a very real and unselfish affair, and there is no evidence to suggest that, for all her taste for dancing and for going into town, it was fickle. Keats asked too much of her. He wished to enslave her as she had enslaved him. He knew in his saner moments that he was unfair to her. "At times," he wrote, "I feel bitterly sorry that ever I made you unhappy." There was unhappiness on both sides—the unhappiness of an engagement that could come to nothing. "There are," as Keats mournfully wrote, "impossibilities in the world." It was Fate, not Fanny, that wrecked the life of Keats. "My dear Brown," he wrote near the end, "I should have had her when I was in health, and I should have remained well." That is not the com-

ment a man makes on a woman whom he regards as his destroying angel. Nor is it a destroying angel that Keats pictures when he writes to Fanny: "You are always new. The last of your kisses was ever the sweetest; the last smile the brightest; the last movement the gracefullest. When you passed my window home yesterday, I was filled with as much admiration as if I had then seen you for the first time." Love such as this is not the enemy of poetry. Without it there would be no poetry but that of patriots, saints and hermits. A biography of Keats should not be a biography without a heroine. That would be *Hamlet* without Ophelia. Sir Sidney Colvin's is a masterly life which is likely to take a permanent place in English biographical literature. But it has one flaw. Sir Sidney did not see how vital a clue Keats left us to the interpretation of his life and genius in that last despairing appeal: "My dear Brown, for my sake be her advocate for ever."

VI

CHARLES LAMB

Charles Lamb was a small, flat-footed man whose eyes were of different colours and who stammered. He nevertheless leaves on many of his readers the impression of personal beauty. De Quincey has told us that in the repose of sleep Lamb's face "assumed an expression almost seraphic, from its intellectual beauty of outline, its childlike simplicity, and its benignity." He added that the eyes "disturbed the unity of effect in Lamb's waking face," and gave a feeling of restlessness, "shifting, like Northern lights, through every mode of combination with fantastic playfulness." This description, I think, suggests something of the quality of Lamb's charm. There are in his best work depths of repose under a restless and prankish surface. He is at once the most restful and the most playful of essayists. Carlyle, whose soul could not find rest in such quietistic virtue as Lamb's, noticed only the playfulness and was disgusted by it. "Charles Lamb,"

he declared, "I do verily believe to be in some considerable degree insane. A more pitiful, rickety, gasping, staggering, stammering tomfool I do not know. He is witty by denying truisms and abjuring good manners." He wrote this in his Diary in 1831 after paying a visit to Lamb at Enfield. "Poor Lamb!" he concluded. "Poor England, when such a despicable abortion is named genius! He said: 'There are just two things I regret in England's history: first, that Guy Fawkes' plot did not take effect (there would have been so glorious an *explosion*); second, that the Royalists did not hang Milton (then we might have laughed at them), etc., etc.' *Armer Teufel!*"

Carlyle would have been astonished if he had foreseen that it would be he and not Lamb who would be the "poor devil" in the eyes of posterity. Lamb is a tragically lovable figure, but Carlyle is a tragically pitiable figure. Lamb, indeed, is in danger of being pedestalled among the saints of literature. He had most of the virtues that a man can have without his virtue becoming a reproach to his fellows. He had most of the vices that a man can have without ceasing to be virtuous. He had enthusiasm that made him at home among the poets, and prejudices that made him at home among common men. His prejudices, however,

were for the most part humorous, as when, speaking of L. E. L., he said: "If she belonged to me I would lock her up and feed her on bread and water till she left off writing poetry. A female poet, a female author of any kind, ranks below an actress, I think." He also denounced clever women as "impudent, forward, unfeminine, and unhealthy in their minds." At the same time, the woman he loved most on earth and devoted his life to was the "female author" with whom he collaborated in the *Tales from Shakespeare*. But probably there did exist somewhere in his nature the seeds of most of those prejudices dear to the common Englishman—prejudices against Scotsmen, Jews, and clever women, against such writers as Voltaire and Shelley, and in favour of eating, drinking and tobacco. He held some of his prejudices comically, and some in sober earnest, but at least he had enough of them mixed up in his composition to keep him in touch with ordinary people. That is one of the first necessities of a writer—especially of a dramatist, novelist or essayist, whose subject-matter is human nature. A great writer may be indifferent to the philosophy of the hour or even to some extent to the politics of the hour, but he cannot safely be indifferent to such matters as his neighbour's love of boiled ham or his fondness for a game of cards.

Lamb sympathised with all the human appetites that will bear talking about. Many noble authors are hosts who talk gloriously, but never invite us to dinner or even ring for the decanter. Lamb remembers that a party should be a party.

It is not enough, however, that a writer should be friends with our appetites. Lamb would never have become the most beloved of English essayists if he had told us only such things as that Coleridge "holds that a man cannot have a pure mind who refuses apple dumplings," or that he himself, though having lost his taste for "the whole vegetable tribe," sticks, nevertheless, to asparagus, "which still seems to inspire gentle thoughts." He was human elsewhere than at the table or beside a bottle. His kindness was higher than gastric. His indulgences seem but a modest disguise for his virtues. His life was a life of industrious self-sacrifice. "I am wedded, Coleridge," he cried, after the murder of his mother, "to the fortunes of my sister and my poor old father"; and his life with his sister affords one of the supreme examples of fidelity in literary biography. Lamb is eminently the essayist of the affections. The best of his essays are made up of affectionate memories. He seems to steep his very words in some dye of memory and affection that no other writer has discovered. He is one

of those rare sentimentalists who speak out of the heart. He has but to write, "Do you remember?" as in *Old China,* and our breasts feel a pang like a home-sick child thinking of the happiness of a distant fireside and a smiling mother that it will see no more. Lamb's work is full of this sense of separation. He is the painter of "the old familiar faces." He conjures up a Utopia of the past, in which aunts were kind and Coleridge, the "inspired charity-boy," was his friend, and every neighbour was a figure as queer as a witch in a fairy-tale. "All, all are gone"—that is his theme.

He is the poet of town-bred boyhood. He is a true lover of antiquity, but antiquity means to him, not merely such things as Oxford and a library of old books: it means a small boy sitting in the gallery of the theatre, and the clerks (mostly bachelors) in the shut-up South-Sea House, and the dead pedagogue with uplifted rod in Christ's Hospital, of whom he wrote : "Poor J. B.! May all his faults be forgiven; and may he be wafted to bliss by little cherub boys, all head and wings, with no *bottoms* to reproach his sublunary infirmities." His essays are a jesting elegy on all that venerable and ruined world. He is at once Hamlet and Yorick in his melancholy and his mirth. He has obeyed the injunction: "Let us all praise famous men," but he has inter-

preted it in terms of the men who were famous in his own small circle when he was a boy and a poor clerk.

Lamb not only made all that world of school and holiday and office a part of antiquity; he also made himself a part of antiquity. He is himself his completest character—the only character, indeed, whom he did not paint in miniature. We know him, as a result of his letters, his essays, and the anecdotes of his friends, more intimately even than we know Dr. Johnson. He has confessed everything except his goodness, and, indeed, did his reputation some harm with his contemporaries by being so public with his shortcomings. He was the enemy of dull priggishness, and would even set up as a buffoon in contrast. He earned the reputation of a drunkard, not entirely deserved, partly by his *Confessions of a Drunkard,* but partly by his habit of bursting into singing "Diddle, diddle, dumpling," under the influence of liquor, whatever the company. His life, however, was a long, half-comic battle against those three friendly enemies of man—liquor, snuff and tobacco. His path was strewn with good resolutions. "This very night," he wrote on one occasion, "I am going to *leave off tobacco!* Surely there must be some other world in which this unconquerable purpose shall be realised." The

perfect anecdote of Lamb's vices is surely that which Hone tells of his abandonment of snuff:

> One summer's evening I was walking on Hampstead Heath with Charles Lamb, and we talked ourselves into a philosophic contempt of our slavery to the habit of snuff-taking, and with the firm resolution of never again taking a single pinch, we threw our snuff-boxes away from the hill on which we stood, far among the furze and the brambles below, and went home in triumph. I began to be very miserable, and was wretched all night. In the morning I was walking on the same hill. I saw Charles Lamb below, searching among the bushes. He looked up laughing, and saying, "What, you are come to look for your snuff-box too!" "Oh, no," said I, taking a pinch out of a paper in my waistcoat pocket, "I went for a halfpennyworth to the first shop that was open."

Lamb's life is an epic of such things as this, and Mr. Lucas is its rhapsodist. He has written an anthological biography that will have a permanent place on the shelves beside the works of Lamb himself.

VII

BYRON ONCE MORE

It will always be easy to take an interest in Byron because he was not only a scamp but a hero—or, alternatively, because he was not only a hero but a scamp. As a hero he can be taken seriously: as a villain he can be taken comically. His letters, like *Don Juan,* reveal him at their best chiefly on the comic side. He was not only a wit, but an audacious wit, and there is a kind of audacity that amuses us, whether in a guttersnipe or in a peer. Byron was a guttersnipe in scarlet and ermine. He enjoyed all the more playing the part of a guttersnipe, because he could play it in a peer's robe. He was obviously the sort of person who, if brought up in the gutter, would be sent to a reformatory. Imagine a reformatory boy, unreformed and possessed of genius, loosed on respectable society, and you will have a picture of Byron. Not that Byron did not share the point of view of respectable society on the most

important matters. He had no sympathy with the heresies of Shelley, whom he thought "crazy against religion and morality." He did not want a new morality, as Shelley did: he was quite content with the old morality and the old immorality. He never could have run away with a woman on principle. Love with him was not a principle, but an appetite. He was a glutton who did not know where to stop. He himself never pretended that it was the desire of the moth for the star that was the cause of his troubles. He was an orthodox materialist, as we may gather from one of his unusually frank letters to Lady Melbourne, a lady in her sixties, to whom he ran with the tale of every fresh amour, like a newsboy with the stop-press edition of an evening paper. We find him at the age of twenty-five or so writing to explain that he was sure to die fairly young. "I began very early and very violently," he wrote, "and alternate extremes of excess and abstinence have utterly destroyed—oh, unsentimental word! —my stomach, and, as Lady Oxford used seriously to say, a broken heart means nothing but a bad digestion." Byron, no doubt, enjoyed posturing, whether he exposed a broken heart or a weak stomach. But, for a poet, he undoubtedly lived and thought on the material plane out of all proportion to his life and thought on the spiritual

plane. He felt much the same dread of a respectable woman as did the wicked young æsthete of the 'nineties. When he was thinking of getting married, and had his eye on Miss Milbanke, he wrote doubtingly to Lady Melbourne: "I admired your niece, but she is engaged to Eden; besides, she deserves a better heart than mine. What shall I do—shall I advertise?" About the same time he was writing concerning women in general:

> I am sadly out of practice lately; except a few sighs to a gentlewoman at supper, who was too much occupied with ye *fourth* wing of her *second* chicken to mind anything that was not material.

If the wing of a chicken was not at least as immaterial as Byron's sighs, there must have been something amiss with the cooking. Byron's sighs to women were material enough, one fancies, to have been visible, like a drayman's breath on a frosty day.

The letters to Lady Melbourne reveal him in an extraordinary light, even for an amorist. While attempting to arrange a match with Lady Melbourne's niece he fills the greater part of his letter to her with the backwash of his intrigue with her daughter-in-law, Lady Caroline Lamb, and with stories of intrigues with various other

ladies. Byron, like many amorists, seems never to have realised that adventures are to the adventurous in love as in other matters, but to have looked on himself as a man pestered by women when he was only a man pestered by ordinary greed and extraordinary opportunity. If he could not shift the blame for his sins on to the woman, he would even shift it on to her husband. "He literally provoked and goaded me into it," he wrote to Lady Melbourne, about the husband of Lady Frances Webster, at a time when he seemed to be falling almost seriously in love with Lady Frances. No one who cares for scandalous literature should miss these letters in which Byron writes off to Lady Melbourne rapturous accounts of every step in the wooing of the wife of his host. "I am glad they amaze you," he wrote to Lady Melbourne concerning the Websters; "anything that confirms and extends one's observations on life and character delights me." It does not appear to have occurred to him that, amazing though the Websters were, they were but as copper to gold compared to his own amazing self. Lady Frances, at least, would have been considerably amazed if she had known that, every time she sighed, the fat young poet who adored her heliographed the fact from Yorkshire to London. In one of his letters he tells of a game of

billiards with his hostess, in the course of which he slipped a love-letter to her. Just at that moment, "who should enter the room but the person who ought at the moment to have been in the Red Sea, if Satan had any civility"—in other words, Webster, his host and her husband. Even as he is writing the description of the incident to Lady Melbourne, Byron makes a parenthesis to tell her that Webster has again come into the room ("I am this moment interrupted by the *Marito,* and write this before him. He has brought me a political pamphlet in MS. to decipher and applaud; I shall content myself with the last; oh, he is gone again"). Ultimately, however, Byron spared Lady Frances—at least, that is how he put it. He protested to Lady Melbourne that he loved the lady and would have sacrificed everything for her, and that Lady Melbourne wronged him to think otherwise. "I hate sentiment," he told her, "and, in consequence, my epistolary levity makes you believe me as hollow and heartless as my letters are light." The truth is, Byron *was,* in many of his relations, heartless. He kissed and told, and he enjoyed telling, at least, as much as he enjoyed kissing. He tells Lady Melbourne, for instance, about the "exquisite oddity" of Lady Frances's letters—"the simplicity of her cunning and her exquisite reasons":

> She vindicates her treachery to [Webster] thus: after condemning deceit in general, and hers in particular, she says: "But then remember it is to deceive *un marito,* and to prevent all the unpleasant consequences, etc., etc."

It is clear that Lady Frances, though pure, shocked Byron, just as Byron, though impure, shocks the average reader. She even besought him to go on writing to her husband:

> Again, she desires me to write to *him kindly,* for she believes he cares for nobody but *me*!

Byron could never understand unconventional behaviour. "Is not all this a comedy?" he asks Lady Melbourne.

Byron, as we read his letters and poems together, seems to lead the double life of an actor. There is the Byron who stands in the middle of the stage in the fierce light that beats upon a poet, and who declaims—how gloriously!—:

> The mountains look on Marathon—
> And Marathon looks on the sea;
> And musing there an hour alone,
> I dreamed that Greece might still be free;
> For standing on the Persians' grave,
> I could not deem myself a slave.

And there is Byron behind the scenes—the Byron who might have been invented by Mr. Shaw as

an example of the moral irresponsibility of the artistic temperament. It may be doubted whether any artist of the first rank could have written such a letter as Byron wrote to Hobhouse in 1818, announcing that his illegitimate daughter, Allegra, had been brought out to Italy from England by Shelley. His reference to the child runs:

> Shelley has got to Milan with the bastard, and its mother; but won't send the shild, unless I will go and see the mother. I have sent a messenger for the shild but I can't leave my quarters, and have "sworn an oath." Between attorneys, clerks, and wives, and children, and friends, my life is made a burthen.

Shelley, for his part, when he is writing to Byron to ask what he is to do with the child (which has been left on his hands month after month), never mentions it but with a delight at least equal to his anxiety to get rid of it. "I think," he tells Byron, "she is the most lovely and engaging child I ever beheld." Shelley's letters to Byron are the letters of a good man, but they are not good letters. They are the formal utterances of an angel. Byron's letters, on the other hand, are good letters, though they are not the letters of a good man. They are the informal utterances of a man possessed by a devil. But whether he was

as black as he painted himself it is impossible to be sure. When little Allegra died at the age of five, he prepared an inscription for her tomb ending with the verse: "I shall go to her, but she shall not return to me." If he had been all heartless, he could never have written his greatest lyrics. His letters, for the most part, take us into the comic recesses of his mind: perhaps this comic Byron is the immortal Byron. But in the letters, as in the legend of his death and in his poems, there are hints of that greater Byron whom Shelley tried to summon into being—a Byron who would have been Byron with a touch of Shelley—a nobler being a little more remote from the splendour of Hell, a candidate for Paradise.

VIII

SHELLEY

Matthew Arnold has had a bad time of it during the Shelley centenary celebrations. He has been denounced in nearly every paper in England, as though, in his attitude to Shelley, he had shown himself to be a malicious old nincompoop. As a matter of fact, Matthew Arnold talked a great deal of common sense about Shelley, and, though he underestimated his genius, how many of the overestimators of Shelley have even praised him so nobly as he is praised in that unforgettable image—"a beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain"? Yet these are the words with which Matthew Arnold's critics quarrel most angrily. It is not enough for them that he called Shelley a beautiful angel. It is a compliment that few poets, few saints even, have deserved. The partisans demand, however, it seems, that he shall also be proclaimed an effectual angel. In one sense, of course, no great poet is ineffectual. We might as well call

a star ineffectual. In a more limited sense, however, a great poet who is also a theorist may be ineffectual, and Shelley, in whom the poet and the theorist are all but inseparable, was undoubtedly ineffectual in this meaning of the word.

He sang a philosophy of love, and one effect of his philosophy was the suicide of Harriet Westbrook. He was, in this instance, ineffectual in not being able to translate his theory into experience in such a way that what was beautiful in theory would also be beautiful in experience. Where a theory was concerned, he did not recognise facts; he recognised only the theory. Thus, his theory that love is "the sole law which should govern the moral world" led him in *Laon and Cythna* (later transformed into *The Revolt of Islam*) to make the lovers brother and sister. This circumstance was, he declared, "intended to startle the reader from the trance of ordinary life." It was introduced "merely to accustom men to that charity and toleration which the exhibition of a practice widely differing from their own has a tendency to promote." Who but an ineffectual angel would have thought of dragging idealised incest into a work of art solely with a view to the improvement of his readers' morals? He did not

wish his readers to practise incest: he merely wished to make them practise charity.

Shelley, indeed, was a man always hastening towards an ideal world which at the touch of experience turned into a mirage. His political, like his ethical, theories had something mirage-like about them. He was a prophet who was so absorbed in the vision of the Promised Land that he had little thought to spare for the human nature that he was trying to incite to make the journey. His own imagination travelled fast as a ray of light, but he could not take human beings with him on so swift a journey. Hence, if he has been effectual, he has been so as an inspiration to the few. He has been ineffectual as regards achieving the earthly paradise he foretold in *The Mask of Anarchy* and *Prometheus Unbound.*

It ought, then, to be possible to appreciate Shelley without abusing Matthew Arnold. Every genius is limited, and we shall not admire the genius the less but the more if we recognise its limitations so clearly that we come to take them for granted. Thus, if we attempt to define Shelley's genius as a poet, we have to start by recognising that there is a formless quality in most of his work when it is compared to the work of Keats or Wordsworth. His poems do

not seem to be quite vertebrate—to have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Their path is as indeterminate as the path of the lark fluttering in the air. With Keats we stand still to survey the earth. With Wordsworth we walk. But Shelley, like his skylark, is a "scorner of the ground," and our feet do not always touch the earth when we are in his company. Even when he journeys by land or water, he rushes us along as though the air were the only element, and we are dizzied by the speed with which we are carried from landscape to landscape. In *Alastor,* scene succeeds scene faster than the eye can seize it.

Shelley, indeed, is the poet of metamorphosis. He loves the miraculous change from shape to shape almost more than he loves any settled shape. This aspect of his genius reveals itself most richly in "The Cloud." Here is the very music of the changing shape. "I change, but I cannot die," is the cloud's boast:

For after the rain, when with never a stain,
The pavilion of heaven is bare,
And the winds and sunbeams with their convex gleams,
Build up the blue dome of air,
I silently laugh at my own cenotaph,
And out of the caverns of rain,
Like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb,
I arise and unbuild it again.

Shelley, too, could create these beautiful and unsubstantial shapes from hour to hour, feeling that each was but a new metamorphosis of universal beauty. "The Cloud" is the divine comedy of metamorphosis. The "Hymn of Pan" is its tragedy:

> I sang of the dancing stars,
> I sang of the dædal Earth,
> And of Heaven—and the giant wars,
> And Love, and Death, and Birth—
> And then I changed my pipings—
> Singing how down the vale of Menalus
> I pursued a maiden and clasped a reed:
> Gods and men, we are all deluded thus!
> It breaks in our bosom and then we bleed:
> All wept, as I think both ye now would,
> If envy or age had not frozen your blood,
> At the sorrow of my sweet pipings.

Here Shelley is aware of the human dissatisfaction—a dissatisfaction that many people feel when reading his poetry—with a life that is too full of mirages and metamorphoses.

> I pursued a maiden and clasped a reed:
> Gods and men, we are all deluded thus!

It is the confession of the ineffectual angel, who had sung:

> Poets are on this cold earth,
> As chameleons might be,

Hidden from their early birth
In a cave beneath the sea.
Where light is, chameleons change!
Where love is not, poets do:
Fame is love disguised: if few
Find either, never think it strange
That poets range.

For this, too, had been a song of metamorphosis.

This love of metamorphosis may, from one point of view, be thought to have limited Shelley's genius, but it limited only to intensify. It was this that enabled him to pass from wonderful image to wonderful image without a pause in that immortal procession of similes in "The Skylark." Every poet has this gift to some extent—the gift by which the metamorphosis of the thing into the image takes place—but Shelley had it in disproportionate abundance because the world of images meant so much more to him than did the world of experience. Not that he was blind to the real world, as we see from his observation of rooks in the morning sun in "The Euganean Hills":

So their plumes of purple grain,
Starred with drops of golden rain,
Gleam above the sunlight woods,
As in silent multitudes
On the morning's fitful gale
Through the broken mist they sail.

No naturalist could have been more accurate in his description than this. Shelley, indeed, claimed for himself in the preface to *Laon and Cythna* that, in his imagery, he was essentially and supremely a poet of experience:

> I have been familiar from boyhood with mountains and lakes and the sea, and the solitude of forests: Danger, which sports upon the brink of precipices, has been my playmate. I have trodden the glaciers of the Alps, and lived under the eye of Mont Blanc. I have been a wanderer among distant fields. I have sailed down mighty rivers, and seen the sun rise and set, and the stars come forth, whilst I have sailed night and day down a rapid stream among mountains. I have seen populous cities, and have watched the passions which rise and spread, and sink and change, amongst assembled multitudes of men. I have seen the theatre of the more visible ravages of tyranny and war, and cities and villages reduced to scattered groups of black and roofless houses, and the naked inhabitants sitting famished upon their desolated thresholds. I have conversed with living men of genius. The poetry of ancient Greece and Rome, and modern Italy, and our own country, has been to me like external nature, a passion and an enjoyment. Such are the sources from which the materials for the imagery of my Poem have been drawn.

All this was true, but Shelley was too impatient of experience to rely on it when there was a richer world of images at hand. Images—

images passing into each other—meant more to him than experience as he wrote such lines as

> My soul is an enchanted boat
> Which, like a sleeping swan, doth float
> Upon the silver waves of thy sweet singing.

He said himself of the poet that

> Nor seeks nor finds he mortal blisses,
> But feeds on the aërial kisses
> Of shapes that haunt thought's wildernesses.

There was never another poet of whom this was so true as of himself. Even when he writes

> A light of laughing flowers along the grass is spread,

or,

> I see the waves upon the shore,
> Like light dissolved in star-showers, thrown,

he seems to shed upon things a light brought from that haunted world. There is more colour in Keats than in Shelley, but there is more light in Shelley than in Keats. Did he not speak of the poet as "hidden in the light of thought"? His radiance is different in kind from that of any other poet. For it is the radiance of a world in which things are not made of substances but of dreams—a world in which we walk over rainbows instead of bridges and ride not upon horses but upon clouds.

IX

PLUTARCH'S ANECDOTES

Anecdotes, like most other forms of literary entertainment, have been spoken ill of by grave persons, but seldom by the wise. "How superficial," wrote Isaac Disraeli, "is that cry of some impertinent pretended geniuses of these times who affect to exclaim, 'Give me no anecdotes of an author, but give me his works!' I have often found the anecdotes more interesting than the works." And he pointed out that "Dr. Johnson devoted one of his periodical papers to a defence of anecdotes." The defence was hardly needed. The imagination of mankind has by universal consent paid honour to the anecdote, and Montaigne is supreme among essayists, and Plutarch among biographers, by virtue of anecdotes as well as of wisdom. Plutarch himself has given the anecdote its just praise in the opening paragraph of his life of Alexander, when he explains: "It is not Histories I am writing, but Lives; and in the most illustrious deeds there is not always a manifestation of virtue or vice—nay,

a slight thing like a phrase or a jest often makes a greater revelation of character than battles where thousands fell, or the greatest armaments, or sieges of cities." Hence the general appetite for trifling facts about great men is not a mere vice of gossips. It may help to preserve a detail which will give a later man of genius a clue to a character—the character of a man or the character of a book. The theory that we can criticise a poet more profoundly by leaving aside the ordinary facts of his life as though he had never existed in the flesh is an absurd piece of pedantry. The life of Shelley throws a flood of light on the poetry of Shelley. It contains in itself a profound criticism of the genius of Shelley—a genius that was of the air rather than of the earth—a genius at once noble and incongruous with the world in which men live.

Writers, however, may make a dozen different uses of anecdotes. The anecdote may be anything from a jest to an awakening touch of portraiture, and from that to a fable that reveals a piece of new or old truth to the imagination. It is not open to dispute that the great writers of anecdotes are not those who believe in anecdotes for anecdotes' sake. They are those who everywhere see signs and connections, and for whom an anecdote is a pattern in little suggesting

a pattern of life itself. Plutarch speaks of himself as looking for "the signs of the soul in men," and the phrase gives some notion of the moral and spiritual pattern into which his anecdotes are woven.

I doubt if a more virtuous imagination ever applied itself to literature. Plutarch's unending quest was virtue, and no illustrious man ever sat to him for a portrait without discovering to him virtues that he would never have revealed to a scandalmonger such as Suetonius. It was as though moral dignity were the chief of the colours on Plutarch's palette. He was fond of contrasting his heroes with one another, but, even when he took for heroes men who were mortal enemies, he would penetrate deep into the heart of each in search of some hidden or imprisoned nobleness. He cannot paint an Alcibiades or a Sulla as a model for children, but even in them he seems to perceive and reverence a greatness of spirit in ruins—some brightness of charm or courage beyond the scope of little men. No other writer except Shakespeare has had the same power of setting before the imagination characters that remain noble though undone by great vices. To do this is, to some extent, in the common tradition of tragedy, but there is in Shakespeare and Plutarch a certain sweetness

and warmth of understanding—something even more than an enthusiasm for the best in full view and admission of the worst—unlike anything else in literature. It was not an accident that Shakespeare drew so freely and so confidently on Plutarch. The geniuses of the two men were akin.

Plutarch, no doubt, was more consciously ethical than Shakespeare, but he was ethical not after the manner of the narrow propagandist, but after the manner of the imaginative artist. He does not write of model characters. He knows that there are no perfect human beings. He recognises the goodness in bad men, and the badness in good men. No biographer has been more keenly aware of the corruptibility of human nature. Hence the characters in his Lives are real men, with not a fault (and hardly the rumour of a fault) hidden. He will not bear false witness for the sake of making great men appear better than they are. He achieves the difficult feat of praising virtue without either canting or lying. He is not afraid to hold the mirror up to nature and to show us virtue fighting a doubtful battle in a corrupt and tragic scene. He does not believe that the virtuous man is necessarily secure either from corruption or defeat, but he believes that virtue itself is secure from defeat. His

recurrent theme is the Christian theme: "Fear not them that kill the body." He is the painter, not only of illustrious lives, but of illustrious deaths. He feels a spectator's elation as he watches a noble fifth act. He obtains from the spectacle of virtue impavid amid the ruins an æsthetic as well as an ethical pleasure. If any man wishes to make a study of the æsthetics of virtue, he will find abundant material in Plutarch. Plutarch writes of the tragic hero as of a man playing a fine part finely. He delights in the moving speeches, in the very gestures. He makes us conscious of a rhythm of nobleness running through human life, as when he describes the conduct of the Spartan women who fled with Cleomenes (the quasi-Socialist king) to Egypt, and who were murdered by their cruel hosts. He first wins our sympathies for the wife of Panteus, "most noble and beautiful to look upon," and tells us how she was but lately married to Panteus, so that "their misfortunes came to them in the heyday of their love." He then describes how this great lady behaved when she was overtaken by death in company with the mother and children of the king:

> She it was who now took the hand of Cratesicleia as she was led forth by the soldiers, held up her robe for

her, and bade her be of good courage. And Cratesicleia herself was not one whit dismayed at death, but asked one favour only, that she might die before the children died. However, when they were come to the place of execution, first the children were slain before her eyes, and then Cratesicleia herself was slain, making but one cry at sorrows so great: "O children, whither are ye gone?" Then the wife of Panteus, girding up her robe, vigorous and stately woman that she was, ministered to each of the dying women calmly and without a word, and laid them out for burial as well as she could. And, finally, after all were cared for, she arrayed herself, let down her robe from about her neck, and suffering no one besides the executioner to come near or look on her, bravely met her end, and had no need of any one to array or cover up her body after death. Thus her decorum of spirit attended her in death, and she maintained to the end that watchful care of her body which she had set over it in life.

That "decorum of spirit" is, for Plutarch, the finishing grace of the noble life. And he summarises his creed in the triumphant comment on the Spartan women: "So then, Sparta, bringing her women's tragedy into emulous competition with that of her men, showed the world that in the last extremity Virtue cannot be outraged by Fortune."

Catholic though Plutarch is, however, in his appreciation of virtue, and gently though he scans his brother man—does he not forgive the

baseness of Aratus in the sentence: "I write this, however, not with any desire to denounce Aratus, for in many ways he was a true Greek and a great one, but out of pity for the weakness of human nature, which, even in characters so notably disposed towards excellence, cannot produce a nobility that is free from blame"?—in spite of this imaginative understanding and sympathy, he has himself a rigid and almost Puritanical standard of virtue. His ideal is an ideal of temperance—of temperance in the pleasures of the body as well as in the love of money and the love of glory. His Alexander the Great is a figure of mixed passions, but he commends him most warmly on those points on which he was temperate, as when the beautiful wife of Dareius and her companions fell into his hands. "But Alexander, as it would seem," writes Plutarch, "considering the mastery of himself a more kingly thing than the conquest of his enemies, neither laid hands upon these women, nor did he know any other before marriage, except Bersine." As for the other women, "displaying in rivalry with their fair looks the beauty of his own sobriety and self-control, he passed them by as though they were lifeless images for display." Again, when Plutarch writes of the Gracchi, he praises them as men who "scorned wealth and

were superior to money," and, if he loves Tiberius the better of the two, it is because he was the more temperate and austere and could never have been charged, as Caius was, with the innocent extravagance of buying silver dolphins at twelve hundred and fifty drachmas the pound. Agis, the youthful king of Sparta, who (though brought up amid luxury) "at once set his face against pleasures" and attempted to banish luxury from the State by restoring equality of possessions, brings together in his person the virtues that inevitably charm Plutarch. Like so many of the old moralists, Plutarch cries out upon riches and pleasures as the great corrupters, and Agis, the censor of these things, comes into a Sparta ruined by gold and silver as a beautiful young redeemer. He dies, a blessed martyr, and his mother, when she stands over his murdered body, kisses his face and cries: "My son, it was thy too great regard for others, and thy gentleness and humanity, which have brought thee to ruin, and us as well." But, even here, Plutarch does not surrender himself wholly to Agis. He will not admit that Agis, any more than the Gracchi, was a perfect man. "Agis," he says, "would seem to have taken hold of things with too little spirit." He "abandoned and left unfinished the designs which he had deliberately

formed and announced owing to a lack of courage due to his youth." Plutarch's heroes are men in whom a god dwells at strife with a devil—the devil of sin and imperfection. He loves them in their inspired hour: he pities them in the hour of their ruin. Thus he does not love men at the expense of truth, as some preachers do, or tell the truth about men at the expense of love, as some cynics do. His imagination holds the reins both of the heart and of the mind. That is the secret of his genius as a biographer.

X

HANS ANDERSEN

Almost the last story Hans Andersen wrote was a sentimental fable, called "The Cripple," which he intended as an apologia for his career as a teller of fairy-tales. It is the story of a bed-ridden boy, the son of a poor gardener and his wife, who receives a story-book as a Christmas present from his father's master and mistress. "He won't get fat on that," says the father when he hears of so useless a gift. In the result, as was to be expected, the book turns out to have a talismanic effect on the fortunes of the family. It converts the father and mother from grumblers into figures of contentment and benevolence, so that they look as though they had won a prize in the lottery. It is also indirectly the cause of little Hans recovering the use of his legs. For, while he is lying in bed one day, he throws the book at the cat in order to scare it away from his bird, and, having missed his shot, he makes a

miraculous effort and leaps out of bed to prevent disaster. Though the bird is dead, Hans is saved, and we leave him to live happily ever afterwards as a prospective schoolmaster. This, it must be confessed, sounds rather like the sort of literature that is given away as Sunday-school prizes. One could conceive a story of the same kind being written by the author of *No Gains Without Pains* or *Jessica's First Prayer*. Hans Andersen, indeed, was in many respects more nearly akin to the writers of tracts and moral tales than to the folklorists. He was a teller of fairy-tales. But he domesticated the fairy-tale and gave it a townsman's home. In his hands it was no longer a courtier, as it had been in the time of Louis XIV, or a wanderer among cottages, as it has been at all times. There was never a teller of fairy-tales to whom kings and queens mattered less. He could make use of royal families in the most charming way, as in those little satires, "The Princess and the Pea" and "The Emperor's New Clothes." But his imagination hankered after the lives of children such as he himself had been. He loved the poor, the ill-treated, and the miserable, and to illuminate their lives with all sorts of fancies. His miracles happen preferably to those who live in poor men's houses. His cinder-girl seldom marries a prince:

if she marries at all, it is usually some honest fellow who will have to work for his living. In Hans Andersen, however, it is the exception rather than the rule to marry and live happily ever afterwards. The best that even Hans the cripple has to look forward to is being a schoolmaster. There was never an author who took fewer pains to give happy endings to his stories.

His own life was a mixture of sadness and the vanity of success. "The Ugly Duckling" is manifestly the fable of his autobiography. Born into the house of a poor cobbler, he was at once shy and ugly, and he appears to have been treated by other children like the duckling which "was bitten and pushed and jeered at" in the farmyard, and upon which "the turkey-cock, who had been born with spurs, and therefore thought himself an emperor, blew himself up like a ship in full sail and bore straight down." His father died early, and at the age of eleven Hans ceased to go to school and was allowed to run wild. He amused himself by devouring plays and acting them with puppets in a toy theatre which he had built, till at the age of eighteen he realised that he must do something to make a living. As he did not wish to dwindle into a tailor, he left his home, confident that he had the genius to succeed in Copenhagen. There his

passion for the theatre led him to try all sorts of occupations. He tried to write; he tried to act; he tried to sing; he tried to dance. "He danced figure dances," wrote Nisbet Bain, "before the most famous *danseuse* of the century, who not unnaturally regarded the queer creature as an escaped lunatic."

By his persistence and his ugliness, perhaps, as much as by the first suggestions of his genius, he contrived at last to interest the manager of the Royal Theatre, and, through him, the King; and the latter had him sent off to school with a pension to begin his education all over again in a class of small boys. Here, one can imagine, the "ugly duckling" had a bad time of it, and the head master, a man with a satirical tongue, seems to have been as merciless as the turkey-cock in the story. Hans's education and his unhappiness went on till he was in his twenties, when he escaped and tried his hand at poetry, farce, fantasy, travel-books and fiction. We hear very little of his novels nowadays—in England at any rate; but we know how they were appreciated at the time from some references in the Browning love-letters, within a few years of their being published. The first of them appeared in 1835, when the author was thirty, and a few months later an instalment of the first volume of the

fairy-tales was published. Andersen described the latter as "fairy-tales which used to please me when I was little and which are not known, I think." The book (which began with "The Tinder-Box" and "Little Claus and Big Claus") was, apart from one critic, reviewed unfavourably where it was reviewed at all. Andersen himself appears to have been on the side of those who thought little of it. His ambition was to write plays and novels and epics for serious people, and all his life he was rather rebellious against the fame which he gradually won all over Europe as a story-teller for children. He longed for appreciation for works like *Ashuerus,* described by Nisbet Bain as "an aphoristic series of historical tableaux from the birth of Christ to the discovery of America," and *To Be or Not to Be,* the last of his novels, in which he sought to "reconcile Nature and the Bible."

We are told of his vexation when a statue was put up in Copenhagen, representing him as surrounded by a group of children. "Not one of the sculptors," he declared, "seems to know that I never *could* tell tales whenever anyone is sitting behind me, or close up to me, still less when I have children in my lap, or on my back, or young Copenhageners leaning right against me. To call me the children's poet is a mere figure

of speech. My aim has always been to be the poet of older people of all sorts: children alone cannot represent me." It is possible, however, that Andersen rather enjoyed taking up a grumpy pose in regard to his stories for children. In any case he continued to publish fresh series of them until 1872, three years before his death. He also enjoyed the enthusiastic reception their popularity brought him during his frequent travels in most of the countries of Europe between England and Turkey. Nor did he object to turning himself into a story-teller at a children's party. There is a description in one of Henry James's books of such a party at Rome, at which Hans Andersen read "The Ugly Duckling" and Browning "The Pied Piper of Hamelin," followed by "a grand march through the spacious Barberini apartment, with [W. W.] Story doing his best on a flute in default of bagpipes." Nor does Andersen seem to have thought too disrespectfully of his fairy-tales when he wrote "The Cripple."

Probably, however, even in his fairy-tales Hans Andersen has always appealed to men and women as strongly as to children. We hear occasionally of children who cannot be reconciled to him because of his incurable habit of pathos. A child can read a fairy-tale like "The Sleeping

Beauty" as if it were playing among toys, but it cannot read "The Marsh King's Daughter" without enacting in its own soul the pathetic adventures of the frog-girl; it cannot read "The Snow Queen" without enduring all the sorrows of Gerda as she travels in search of her lost friend: it cannot read "The Little Mermaid" without feeling as if the knives were piercing its feet just as the mermaid felt when she got her wish to become a human being so that she might possess a soul. Even in "The Wild Swans," though Lisa's eleven brothers are all restored to humanity from the shapes into which their wicked step-mother had put them, it is only after a series of harrowing incidents; and Lisa herself has to be rescued from being burned as a witch. Hans Andersen is surely the least gay of all writers for children. He does not invent exquisite confectionery for the nursery such as Charles Perrault, having heard a nurse telling the stories to his little son, gave the world in "Cinderella" and "Bluebeard." To read stories like these is to enter into a game of make-believe, no more to be taken seriously than a charade. The Chinese lanterns of a happy ending seem to illuminate them all the way through. But Hans Andersen does not invite you to a charade. He invites you to put yourself in the place of the

little match-girl who is frozen to death in the snow on New Year's Eve after burning her matches and pretending that she is enjoying all the delights of Christmas. He is more like a child's Dickens than a successor of the ladies and gentlemen who wrote fairy-tales in the age of Louis XIV and Louis XV. He is like Dickens, indeed, not only in his genius for compassion, but in his abounding inventiveness, his grotesque detail, and his humour. He is never so recklessly cheerful as Dickens with the cheerfulness that suggests eating and drinking. He makes us smile rather than laugh aloud with his comedy. But how delightful is the fun at the end of "Soup on a Sausage Peg" when the Mouse King learns that the only way in which the soup can be made is by stirring a pot of boiling water with his own tail! And what child does not love in all its bones the cunning in "Little Claus and Big Claus," when Big Claus is tricked into killing his horses, murdering his grandmother, and finally allowing himself to be tied in a sack and thrown into the river?

But Hans Andersen was too urgent a moralist to be content to write stories so immorally amusing as this. He was as anxious as a preacher or a parent or Dickens to see children Christians of sorts, and he used the fairy-tale continually as a

means of teaching and warning them. In one story he makes the storks decide to punish an ugly boy who had been cruel to them. "There is a little dead child in the pond, one that has dreamed itself to death; we will bring that for him. Then he will cry because we have brought him a little dead brother." That is certainly rather harsh. "The Girl Who Trod on the Loaf" is equally severe. As a result of her cruelty in tearing flies' wings off and her wastefulness in using a good loaf as a stepping-stone, she sinks down through the mud into Hell, where she is tormented with flies that crawl over her eyes, and having had their wings pulled out, cannot fly away. Hans Andersen, however, like Ibsen in *Peer Gynt,* believes in redemption through the love of others, and even the girl who trod on the loaf is ultimately saved. "Love begets life" runs like a text through "The Marsh King's Daughter." His stories as a whole are an imaginative representation of that gospel—a gospel that so easily becomes mush and platitude in ordinary hands. But Andersen's genius as a narrator, as a grotesque inventor of incident and comic detail, saves his gospel from commonness. He may write a parable about a darning-needle, but he succeeds in making his darning-needle alive, like a dog or a schoolboy.

He endows everything he sees—china shepherdesses, tin soldiers, mice and flowers—with the similitude of life, action and conversation. He can make the inhabitants of one's mantelpiece capable of epic adventures, and has a greater sense of possibilities in a pair of tongs or a door-knocker than most of us have in men and women. He is a creator of a thousand fancies. He loves imagining elves no higher than a mouse's knee, and mice going on their travels leaning on sausage-skewers as pilgrims' staves, and little Thumbelina, whose cradle was "a neat polished walnut-shell . . . blue violet-leaves were her mattresses, with a rose-leaf for a coverlet." His fancy never becomes lyrical or sweeps us off our feet, like Shakespeare's in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* But there was nothing else like it in the fairy-tale literature of the nineteenth century. And his pages are full of the poetry of flights of birds. More than anything else one thinks of Hans Andersen as a lonely child watching a flight of swans or storks till it is lost to view, silent and full of wonder and sadness. Mr. Edmund Gosse, in *Two Visits to Denmark,* a book in which everything is interesting except the title, describes a visit which he paid to Hans Andersen at Copenhagen in his old age, when "he took me out into the balcony

and bade me notice the long caravan of ships going by in the Sound below— 'they are like a flock of wild swans' he said." The image might have occurred to anyone, but it is specially interesting as coming from the mouth of Hans Andersen, because it seems to express so much of his vision of the world. He was, above all men of his century, the magician of the flock of wild swans.

XI

JOHN CLARE

Mr. Arthur Symons edited a good selection of the poems of John Clare a few years ago, and Edward Thomas was always faithful in his praise. Yet Messrs. Blunden & Porter's new edition of Clare's work has meant for most of its readers the rediscovery of a lost man of genius. For Clare, though he enjoyed a "boom" in London almost exactly a hundred years ago, has never been fully appreciated: he has never even been fully printed. In 1820 he was more famous than Keats, who had the same publisher. Keats's 1820 volume was one of the great books of English literature, but the public preferred John Clare, and three editions of *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* were sold between January 16 and the end of March. It was not that the public had discovered a poet: it was merely that they had discovered an agricultural labourer who was a poet. At the same time, to have been over-boomed was bound to do Clare's reputation

harm. It raised hopes that his verse did not satisfy, and readers who come to an author expecting too much are apt in their disappointment to blame him for even more faults than he possesses. It is obvious that if we are asked to appreciate Clare as a poet of the same company as Keats and Shelley, our minds will be preoccupied with the feeling that he is an intruder, and we shall be able to listen to him with all our attention only when he has ceased to challenge such ruinous comparisons. I do not know whether the critics of 1820 gave more praise to Clare than to Keats. But the public did. The public blew a bubble, and the bubble burst. Had Clare, instead of making a sensation, merely made the quiet reputation he deserved, he would not have collapsed so soon into one of the most unjustly neglected poets of the nineteenth century.

In order to appreciate Clare, we have to begin by admitting that he never wrote either a great or a perfect poem. He never wrote a "Tintern Abbey" or a "Skylark" or a "Grecian Urn" or a "Tiger" or a "Red, Red Rose" or an "Ode to Evening." He was not a great artist uttering the final rhythms and the final sentences—rhythms and sentences so perfect that they seem like existences that have escaped out of eternity.

His place in literature is nearer that of Gilbert White or Mr. W. H. Hudson than that of Shelley. His poetry is a mirror of things rather than a window of the imagination. It belongs to a borderland where naturalism and literature meet. He brings things seen before our eyes: the record of his senses is more important than the record of his imagination or his thoughts. He was an observer whose consuming delight was to watch—to watch a grasshopper or a snail, a thistle or a yellow-hammer. The things that a Wordsworth or a Shelley sees or hears open the door, as it were, to still more wonderful things that the poet has not seen or heard. Shelley hears a skylark, and it becomes not only a skylark, but a flight of images, illumining the mysteries of life as they pass. Wordsworth hears a Highland girl singing, and her song becomes not only a girl's song, but the secret music of far times and far places, brimming over and filling the world. To Clare the skylark was most wonderful as a thing seen and noticed: it was the end, not the beginning, of wonders. He may be led by real things to a train of reflections: he is never at his best led to a train of images. His realism, however, is often steeped in the pathos of memory, and it is largely this that changes his naturalism into poetry. One of the most beautiful of

his poems is called "Remembrances," and who that has read it can ever forget the moving verse in which Clare calls up the playtime of his boyhood and compares it with a world in which men have begun to hang dead moles on trees?

When from school o'er Little Field with its brook and wooden brig,
Where I swaggered like a man though I was not half so big,
While I held my little plough though 'twas but a willow twig,
And drove my team along made of nothing but a name,
"Gee hep" and "hoit" and "woi"—O I never call to mind
These pleasant names of places but I leave a sigh behind,
While I see little mouldiwarps hang sweeing to the wind
On the only aged willow that in all the field remains,
And nature hides her face while they're sweeing in their chains
And in a silent murmuring complains.

The pity that we find in this poem is, perhaps, the dominant emotion in Clare's work. Helpless living things made the strongest appeal to him, and he honoured the spear-thistle, as it had never been honoured in poetry before, chiefly because of the protection it gave to the nesting partridge and the lark. In "Spear Thistle," after de-

scribing the partridge, which will lie down in a thistle-clump,

> and dust
> And prune its horse-shoe circled breast,

he continues:

> The sheep when hunger presses sore
> May nip the clover round its nest;
> But soon the thistle wounding sore
> Relieves it from each brushng guest
> That leaves a bit of wool behind,
> The yellow-hammer loves to find.
>
> The horse will set his foot and bite
> Close to the ground lark's guarded nest
> And snort to meet the prickly sight;
> He fans the feathers of her breast—
> Yet thistles prick so deep that he
> Turns back and leaves her dwelling free.

We have only to compare the detail of Clare's work with the sonorous generalisations in, say, Thomson's *Seasons*—which he admired—to realise the immense gulf that divides Clare from his eighteenth-century predecessors. Clare, indeed, is more like a twentieth-century than an eighteenth-century poet. He is almost more like a twentieth-century than a nineteenth-century poet. He is "neo-Georgian" in his prefer-

ence for the fact in itself above the image or the phrase. The thing itself is all the image he asks, and Mr. W. H. Davies in his simplest mood might have made the same confession of faith as Clare:

I love the verse that mild and bland
 Breathes of green fields and open sky,
I love the muse that in her hand
 Bears flowers of native poesy;
Who walks nor skips the pasture brook
 In scorn, but by the drinking horse
Leans o'er its little brig to look
 How far the sallows lean across.

There is no poet, I fancy, in whose work the phrase, "I love," recurs oftener. His poetry is largely a list of the things he loves:

I love at early morn, from new-mown swatl
 To see the startled frog his route pursue;
To mark while, leaping o'er the dripping path,
 His bright sides scatter dew,
The early lark that from its bustle flies
 To hail his matin new;
 And watch him to the skies:

To note on hedgerow baulks, in moisture sprent,
 The jetty snail creep from the mossy thorn,
With earnest heed and tremulous intent,
 Frail brother of the morn,

That from the tiny bents and misted leaves
Withdraws his timid horn,
And fearful visions weaves.

As we read Clare we discover that it is almost always the little things that catch his eye:

Grasshoppers go in many a thrumming spring,
And now to stalks of tasselled sow-grass cling,
That shakes and swees awhile, but still keeps straight;
While arching ox-eye doubles with his weight.
Next on the cat-tail grass with farther bound
He springs, that bends until they touch the ground.

He is never weary of describing the bees. He praises the ants. Of the birds, he seems to love the small ones best. How beautifully he writes of the hedge-sparrow's little song!:

While in a quiet mood hedge-sparrows try
An inward stir of shadowed melody.

There is the genius of a lover in this description. Here is something finally said. Clare continually labours to make the report of his eye and ear accurate. He even begins one of his *Asylum Poems* with the line:

Sweet chestnuts brown like soling leather turn;

and, in another, pursues realism in describing an April evening to the point of writing:

Sheep ointment seems to daub the dead-hued sky.

His attempt at giving an exact echo of the blue-tit's song—his very feeble attempt—makes the success of one of his good poems tremble for a moment in the balance:

Dreamers, mark the honey bee;
Mark the tree
Where the blue cap *"tootle tee"*
Sings a glee,
Sung to Adam and to Eve—
Here they be.
When floods covered every bough,
Noah's ark
Heard that ballad singing now;
Hark, hark.

"Tootle, tootle, tootle tee"—
Can it be
Pride and fame must shadows be?
Come and see—
Every season owns her own;
Bird and bee
Sing creation's music on;
Nature's glee
Is in every mood and tone
Eternity.

Clare comes nearer an imaginative vision of life in this than in most of his poems. But, where Shelley would have given us an image, Clare is content to set down *"Tootle, tootle, tootle tee."*

His poems of human life are of less account than his poems of bird and insect life; but one of the most beautiful of all his poems, "The Dying Child," introduces a human figure among the bees and flowers. How moving are the first three verses!:

He could not die when trees were green,
 For he loved the time too well.
His little hands, when flowers were seen,
 Were held for the bluebell,
As he was carried o'er the green.

His eye glanced at the white-nosed bee,
 He knew those children of the spring:
When he was well and on the lea,
 He held one in his hands to sing,
Which filled his heart with glee.

Infants, the children of the spring!
 How can an infant die
When butterflies are on the wing,
 Green grass, and such a sky?
How can they die at spring?

The writer of these lines was a poet worth rediscovering, and Messrs. Blunden and Porter have given us a book in which we can wander at will, peering into hedges and at the traffic of the grass, as in few even of the great poets. Mr. Blunden has also written an admirable, though

needlessly pugnacious account of the life of The Green Man, as Clare was called in Lamb's circle because of his clothes. It is a story of struggle, poverty, drink, a moment's fame without money to correspond, a long family, and the madness of a man who, escaping from the asylum, ate "the grass on the roadside which seemed to taste something like bread." Knowing the events of his life, we read Clare's poetry with all the more intense curiosity. And, if we do not expect to find a Blake or a Wordsworth, we shall not be disappointed. Certainly this is a book that must go on the shelf near the works of Mr. Hudson.

XII

HISTORIANS AS ENTERTAINERS

Herodotus is one of the oldest illustrations of the fact that a test of good literature is its capacity to entertain us. There are two sorts of writing—the entertaining and the dull—and the dull is outside literature. This is a fact which, though it is perfectly obvious, tends to be forgotten by many writers, even by many able writers, in every century. Authors fall in love with their own ponderosity, forgetting that a huge tome is too often a huge tomb. That is the explanation of the long lives and the still longer histories that the publishers and the authors of the nineteenth century loved. Biographies became life-size, and histories rivalled in length the wars they chronicled. A Victorian biographer appeared to think that he was performing more ambitious work in writing a life of Milton in six volumes than if he were to write it in one. Similarly, a historian instead of giving us a Cromwell that the eye could take in as one ab-

sorbing figure, would devote one volume to this bit of him and another to that, and would leave us with a mass of information about his *disjecta membra,* which we might or might not piece together, just as we pleased. This was called scientific history. Its disciples forgot that history is an art and that, like all other arts, whatever its ultimate object, it should be subject to the law of entertainment. Nothing else will keep history alive, except as a schoolbook or a source-book. An inaccurate history that entertains will outlive an accurate history that wearies. Herodotus did not cease to be read, even when he was generally regarded as the father of lies. It is true that scholars no longer regard him as a liar, and that Mr. Godley, in the preface to his admirable translation in the Loeb Library, claims with Dr. Macan that "the most stringent application of historical and critical methods to the text of Herodotus leaves the work irrevocably and irreplaceably at the head of European prose literature, whether in its scientific or in its artistic character." At the same time, even if we did not know about the scientific value of Herodotus, his artistic value would be indisputable. He was as indefatigably interested in the world as Mr. Pepys was in himself, and he can infect us with the thrill of his delightful curiosity.

Curiosity, on the other hand, implies interest in some sort of truth, and the pursuit of some sort of truth seems to be an essential in a book that is to entertain us permanently. The artist is moralist as well as entertainer, and the truth that lies in him shapes his work, whether he is Æschylus or Plato, Herodotus or Sallust. Sallust's *Jugurtha,* Professor Rolfe warns us in a preface to the Loeb translation, "is rather like a historical novel of the better class than like sober history" and the *Cataline,* we are told, "is inaccurate in many of its details . . . with inevitable distortion of the facts." Even so, both works are entertaining statements of a great moral idea —the idea of the corruption of human nature by success. Sallust, it may be argued, had the propagandist purpose of attacking the corruption of the nobles rather than the moral purpose of exhibiting the corruption of human nature, but he writes his history with an amazing dramatic sense of the catastrophe that occurs even in great souls. It occurred in the soul of Jugurtha, and in the soul of Rome. "When Carthage, the rival of Rome's sway, had perished root and branch, and all seas and lands were open, then Fortune began to grow cruel and to bring confusion into all our affairs. Those who had found it easy to bear hardship and dangers, anxiety and adver-

sity, found leisure and wealth, desirable under other circumstances, a burden and a curse. Hence the lust for power, then for money, grew upon them; these were, I may say, the root of all evils." What is all literature but the fable of such things? It may be an inspiring fable or a derisive fable, a tragic fable or a comic fable, but in any event it cannot be good literature unless it is an entertaining fable.

Herodotus, certainly, never forgets for long that history is a fable. That wonderful anecdote of Gyges and the infatuated King who compelled him to hide behind the door and to look on the Queen when she was naked, with the result that the Queen on discovering him, ordered him to kill the King and marry her or die himself, is not a mere unrelated scene as from a ballet, but has its tragic signature five generations later, when the power of Crœsus, the descendant of Gyges, is destroyed and he is a prisoner in the camp of Cyrus. Crœsus, being unable to understand how the disaster had happened, obtained permission from Cyrus to send messengers to Delphi to enquire of the Oracle why it had deceived him. And the priestess replied: "None may escape his destined lot, not even a god. Crœsus hath paid for the sin of his ancestor of the fifth generation: who, being of the guard of the Heraclidæ,

was led by the guile of a woman to slay his master, and took to himself the royal state of that master, whereto he had no right." We find in pagan literature a sense of the divine government of the world that is missing from the greater part of modern Christian literature. The pagan historians, I think, have a profounder sense of sin and of the sufferings that result from sin than most of the Christian historians. Nowadays, we hesitate before allowing even Richard III or Judge Jeffreys to have been a sinner. And, as we have found no substitute for those ancient colours of vice and virtue, much of our history is colourless and uninteresting. The sense of sin is of infinite value to an artist, if only because it enables him to see how striking are the contrasts that exist in every human being. He sees the great man as a miserable sinner, and he sees him all the more truthfully for this. He sees the beautiful woman as a miserable sinner, and he sees her all the more truthfully for this. Aristotle, indeed, thought that it was impossible to write great tragic literature except about a noble character who was seen to be a sinner. It was probably never done till the appearance of the Gospels, and I am not sure whether it has been done since. Shakespeare had as compassionate a sense of the flaw in human nature even at its

greatest as the Greek dramatists and the supreme Greek biographer.

There is, no doubt, a school of writers who have so keen a sense of the flaws that they can see scarcely anything else. This is inimical to art. Suetonius provides us with a feast of flaws, from which we rise with the feeling that we have been dining on spiced and putrid dishes. His was not a disinterested observation of human character. He was a specialist in the vices. It is appalling to think what he would have made of Sempronia, one of the many Roman ladies whom Catiline enticed into his conspiracy. Sallust's portrait of her is a masterpiece:

> Now among these women was Sempronia, who had often committed many crimes of masculine daring. In birth and beauty, in her husband and children, she was abundantly favoured by fortune; well read in the literature of Greece and Rome, able to play the lyre and dance more skilfully than an honest woman need, and having many other accomplishments which minister to voluptuousness. But there was nothing which she held so cheap as modesty and chastity; you could not easily say whether she was less sparing of her money or her honour; her desires were so ardent that she sought men more often than she was sought by them. Even before the time of the conspiracy, she had often broken her word, repudiated her debts, been privy to murder; poverty and extravagance combined had driven her head-

long. Nevertheless, she was a woman of no mean endowments; she could write verses, bandy jests, and use language which was modest, or tender, or wanton; in fine, she possessed a high degree of wit and charm.

A miserable sinner, undoubtedly. How odious and how interesting!

But, even as gossips, how these ancient historians still keep their hold on us! Herodotus is the father of nursery tales as well as of moral tales. His account of Egypt in the second book of his history may appeal to the anthropologist in some of us; it also appeals to the child in all of us. He must have omitted thousands of the stories that he heard on his travels, but he had a genius for finding room for the interesting story. His pages are rich in attractive stories like that which tells how Psammetichus decided whether the Egyptians or the Phrygians were the oldest nation:

Now before Psammetichus became king of Egypt, the Egyptians deemed themselves to be the oldest nation on earth. . . . Psammetichus, being nowise able to discover by enquiry what men had first come into being, devised a plan whereby he took two new-born children of common men and gave them to a shepherd to bring up among his flock. He gave charge that none should speak any word in their hearing; they were to lie by themselves in a lonely hut, and in due season the shepherd was to bring

goats and give the children their milk and do all else needful. Psammetichus did this, and gave this charge, because he desired to hear what speech would first break from the children, when they were past the age of indistinct babbling. And he had his wish; for, when the shepherd had done as he was bidden for two years, one day as he opened the door and entered, both the children ran to him, stretching out their hands and calling "Bekos." When he first heard this he said nothing of it; but coming often and taking careful note, he was ever hearing this same word, till at last he told the matter to his master, and on command brought the children into the King's presence. Psammetichus heard them himself, and enquired to what language this word "Bekos" might belong; he found it to be a Phrygian word signifying bread. Reasoning from this fact the Egyptians confessed that the Phrygians were older than they.

Scientific? Perhaps not. And yet science and art may embrace in the recording of such stories as this. But it is in the museum of the arts, not in that of the sciences, that Herodotus holds his immortal place. He may not be the first of the scientific historians: he is certainly the first of the European masters of the art of entertaining prose.

XIII

A WORDSWORTH DISCOVERY

A good many people were pleased—not without malice—when Professor Harper discovered a few years ago that Wordsworth had an illegitimate daughter. It was like hearing a piece of scandal about an archbishop. As a matter of fact, the story, as Professor Harper tells it, is not a scandal; it is merely a puzzle. The figures in the episode are names and shadows: we know almost nothing as regards their feelings for each other or what it was that prevented the lovers from marrying. Professor Harper believes that Wordsworth has left a disguised version of the story in *Vaudracour and Julia.* Wordsworth himself says of *Vaudracour and Julia* that "the facts are true," and the main "facts" in the poem are that the lovers wish to marry, cannot gain their parent's consent, and give way to passion, and that after this their parents, instead of softening in their attitude, insist more harshly

than ever on keeping them apart. Wordsworth is vehement in his contention that Vaudracour was no common seducer yielding to the lusts of the flesh, and the suggestion is fairly clear that the youth thought he was taking the only way to make marriage inevitable. Consider these lines, which impute honourable motives, if not honourable conduct, to the lover:

> So passed the time, till whether through effect
> Of some unguarded moment that dissolved
> Virtuous restraint—ah, speak it, think it, not!
> Deem rather that the fervent youth, who saw
> So many bars between his present state
> And the dear haven where he wished to be
> In honourable wedlock with his love,
> Was in his judgment tempted to decline
> To perilous weakness, and entrust his cause
> To nature for a happy end of all;
> Deem that by such fond hope the youth was swayed
> And bear with their transgression, when I add
> That Julia, wanting yet the name of wife,
> Carried about her for a secret grief,
> The promise of a mother.

These lines have an ethical rather than a poetical interest. Whether Wordsworth, in writing them, was consciously or subconsciously attempting his own moral justification, we do not know. But Professor Harper has collected a number of facts

that make it appear likely that he was. Certainly, the story of Wordsworth and Marie-Anne Vallon at Orleans in 1792, so far as we know it, might without violence be dramatised as the story of Vaudracour and Julia.

Bear in mind, for example, the "many bars" that stood in the way of Wordsworth's marriage to Marie-Anne, or "Annette," Vallon. They were not, as in the poem, barriers of class, but they were the equally insurmountable barriers of creed, both political and religious. Wordsworth was a young Englishman, full of the ardour of the Revolution, and a Protestant of so sceptical a cast that Coleridge described him as a "semi-atheist." Annette, for her part, was the child of parents who were zealots in the cause of Royalism and Catholicism. They must have regarded the coming of such a suitor as Wordsworth with the same horror with which a reader of the *Morning Post* would learn that his daughter had fallen in love with a Catholic Sinn Feiner or a Jewish Bolshevist. The position was even more bitter than this suggests. The sectarian and political passions that raged in France were more comparable to the passions of Orange Belfast than to any that can be imagined in the atmosphere of modern England. Wordsworth may well have appeared to these orthodox par-

ents a representative of Satan. He was the murder-gang personified. Nor, to make up for this, was he even a good match. He was an exceedingly poor young man who had just come of age. Add to this the fact that it was almost impossible at the time for an orthodox Catholic and Royalist to marry a Revolutionary sceptic. Marriage had become a State affair under the Revolution, and no Catholic could permit his daughter to go through a marriage ceremony that seemed to deny that marriage was a sacrament. It is true that marriages could still be performed by the clergy, but only by such clergy as accepted their position under the new constitution as functionaries of the State. Republican clergy of this kind would be regarded by the Vallon family as traitors and scarcely better than atheists. Marriages celebrated by them would be looked on as invalid—as mere licences to live in sin. Had Wordsworth become a Catholic, or had he been of a compromising disposition, it would have been easy enough to find a non-juring priest to perform the ceremony. But it is unlikely that a priest, who was zealous enough to face persecution rather than recognise the Republic, would have been willing to marry one of his flock to a free-thinking revolutionary. Respectability might urge that, when the lovers had already

gone so far, nothing remained but to make the best of it and permit them to marry. Fanaticism, however, might well regard such a marriage as but the adding of one sin to another. The Church itself, by marrying the sinners, would make itself a partner in the sin. We have to reflect how adamantine is the faith of the orthodox in order to understand the "many bars" that hindered the marriage of Wordsworth and Annette. Remembering this, we cannot dismiss as improbable Professor Harper's theory that Wordsworth abandoned Marie-Anne reluctantly, and that when he settled in Blois, he did so because he had been driven away by her relatives and yet desired to remain near her.

All we know of Wordsworth, and all the facts in Professor Harper's story, make it impossible to believe that he would willingly have deserted Marie-Anne and his daughter. The baptism of the child was entered in the registry of baptisms in the parish of Sainte-Croix, "Williams Wordsodsth" in his absence being represented by a local official. She was baptised Anne Caroline, and it was as Anne Caroline Wordsworth, daughter of "Williams Wordsworth, landowner," that she was married in Paris about twenty-four years later. Wordsworth appears to have kept constantly in touch with her and her

mother in the meantime, and, when peace was in sight in 1802, he and his sister Dorothy determined to cross to France and see them. A meeting took place in Calais. It was the preliminary to a marriage, but not to marriage with Annette, who, indeed, never married, but went through life as Madame Vallon. Two months after the Calais meeting Wordsworth married Mary Hutchinson. That he had been deeply moved by the meeting with his child rather than with her mother is suggested by the mood of the sonnet he wrote at the time: "It is a beauteous evening, calm and free."

Professor Harper is of opinion that Wordsworth's love for Marie-Anne Vallon was an event of supreme importance in his life. He holds that the facts he has discovered throw "light upon many of Wordsworth's poems." I do not think that on this point he has proved his case. In his two-volume life of Wordsworth, it may be remembered, he even goes so far as to assign the "Lucy" of so many beautiful poems to a French original. Lovers of a great poet are naturally led to speculate as to the experiences out of which his poems grew. There is nothing of the vice of Paul Pry in attempting thus to discover the sources of the experiences the poet communicates in his verse. The theme of every poet

is the experiences that have moved his soul most profoundly. And many, or most, of those experiences spring from his relations with other human beings. At the same time, there is no evidence that Wordsworth in his work was ever influenced by Marie-Anne Vallon as Keats was influenced by Fanny Brawne. It is doubtful if any women every really took the place of his sister in his heart. "She gave me eyes, she gave me ears," could be said only of Dorothy. It was the fire of affection, not the fire of passion, that glowed in Wordsworth's soul. "Oh, my dear, dear sister!" he cried in one of his letters, "with what transport shall I again meet you! With what rapture shall I again wear out the day in your sight. So eager is my desire to see you that all other obstacles vanish. I see you in a moment running, or rather flying, to my arms." He was in life as in literature a devoted brother rather than a devoted lover. Even Professor Harper can give no other woman but Dorothy the position of presiding genius over his life and work. This does not necessarily involve our acceptance of the common theory that Dorothy was the original around whom the "Lucy" poems were written. But, had Lucy been a Frenchwoman, Wordsworth would hardly have written:

I travelled among unknown men
In lands beyond the sea;
Nor England did I know till then
What love I bore to thee . . .

Among thy mountains did I feel
The joy of my desire;
And she I cherished turned her wheel
Beside an English fire.

To interpret this as a dramatisation of his early passion in France is to strain probability.[1]

Professor Harper, then, has discovered an interesting episode in Wordsworth's life, but I do not think he has discovered what may be called a key episode. It may turn out to have had more influence on Wordsworth's destiny than at present appears. But we do not yet know enough even about the circumstances to get any fresh light from it either on his work or on his character.

As regards Annette, we learn from a letter of Dorothy's, written in 1815, that she shared, and continued to share, the Royalist convictions of her people. She often, Dorothy affirms, "risked her life in defence of adherents to that cause, and

[1] I understand that Profesor Harper disclaims what seemed to me the obvious interpretation of a passage in his book.

she despised and detested Buonaparte." In 1820, Wordsworth, his wife, and Dorothy visited Paris and lived on intimate terms with Annette, Caroline, and Caroline's husband. They even went to lodge in the same street. Of Caroline it was reported earlier that "she resembles her father most strikingly." For the rest, Christopher Wordsworth, Bishop of Lincoln, when writing his uncle's biography, said nothing about the matter. He cannot be accused of having hidden anything of very great significance. The truth is now out, and we know little more about Wordsworth than we knew before.

XIV

THE POETRY OF POE

"My first object (as usual) was originality," said Poe, in discussing the versification of "The Raven." It is a remarkable fact that the two great poets of America—Poe and Whitman—were two of the most deliberately original poets of the nineteenth century—in English at least. They were both conscious frontiersmen of poetry, drawn to unmapped territories, settlers on virgin soil. This may help to explain some of their imperfections. Each of them gives us the impression of a genius rich but imperfectly cultivated. Different though they were from each other, they resembled each other in a certain lack of the talent of order, of taste, of "finish." They were both capable of lapses from genius into incompetence, from beauty into provincialism, to an unusual degree. A contemporary critic said of Poe that he had not talent equal to his genius. Neither had Whitman. In the greatest poets, genius and talent go hand in hand. Poe seldom wrote a poem in which his mood seems to have

attained its perfect expression. His poetry does not get near perfection even in the sense in which Coleridge's fragments do. It seems, as a rule, like a first sketch for greater things. His *Complete Poems,* indeed, is one of the most wonderful sketch-books of a man of genius in literature.

Poe himself attributed the defects of his work to lack of leisure rather than to lack of talent. "Events not to be controlled," he said in the preface to the 1845 edition of his poems, "have prevented me from making, at any time, any serious effort in what, under happier circumstances, would have been the field of my choice. With me poetry has been not a purpose but a passion, and the passions should be held in reverence; they must not—they cannot at will be excited, with an eye to the petty compensations, or the more petty commendations, of mankind." Other poets, however, who have lived in as bitter circumstances as Poe, have written an incomparably greater body of good poetry. There was in him some flaw that kept him, as a rule, from being more than a great beginner. It may have been partly due to theatrical qualities that he inherited from his actress mother. Again and again he mingles the landscape of dreamland with the tawdry grandeur of the stage. He takes

a footlights view of romance when, having begun "Lenore" with the lines——

Ah, broken is the golden bowl!—the spirit flown for ever!—
Let the bell toll!—a saintly soul floats on the Stygian river

he continues:

And, Guy de Vere, hast *thou* no tear?—weep now, or never more.

This, no doubt, was in tune with the fashionable romance of the day, but Poe's romantic conceptions at times were those of one who was especially entranced by stage trappings. He made his heroines rich and highborn as well as beautiful. In "Lenore" he cries:

Wretches, ye loved her for her wealth, and hated her for her pride!

In "The Sleeper" he speaks of:

The crested palls
Of her grand family funerals.

In "Annabel Lee" he made the very angels heroes of the green-room:

Her highborn kinsmen came
And bore her away from me.

On the other hand, Poe's theatricalism, though it explains some of the faults of his poetry, leaves

unexplained the fact that he has cast a greater spell on succeeding poets than has even so great a theatrical genius as Byron. Poe is one of those poets who are sources of poetry. He discovered —though not without forerunners such as Coleridge—a new borderland for the imagination, where death and despair had a new strangeness. He seems to have reached it, not through mere fancy, as his imitators do, but through experience. When he was a youth he worshipped Mrs. Helen Stannard, the mother of one of his friends. She went mad and died, and for some time after her death Poe used to haunt her tomb by night, and "when the autumnal rains fell and the winds wailed mournfully over the graves, he lingered longest, and came away most regretfully." J. H. Ingram and other writers have found in these "solitary churchyard vigils" the clue to "much that seems strange and abnormal in the poet's after life." Love overshadowed by death, beauty overshadowed by death, remained the recurrent theme of his verse. It is the theme of his supreme poem, "Annabel Lee," with its haunting close:

> In the sepulchre there by the sea,
> In her tomb by the sounding sea.

Poe was a poet for whom life was darkened by

experience and illuminated only by visions. In the beginning, romance

> loves to nod and sing
> With drowsy head and painted wing,
> Among the green leaves as they shake
> Far down within some shadowy lake.

In time, however, this born day-dreamer can find no comfort in day-dreaming:

> Of late, eternal Condor years
> So shake the very Heaven on high
> With tumult as they thunder by,
> I have no time for idle cares
> Through gazing on the unquiet sky.
> And when an hour with calmer wings
> Its down upon my spirit flings—
> That little time with lyre and rhyme
> To while away—forbidden things!—
> My heart would feel to be a crime
> Unless it trembled with the strings.

There is a terrible sincerity in Poe's sense of the presence of death. His vision of mortal men, at least, was not theatrical in its gloom:

> Mimes, in the form of God on high,
> Mutter and mumble low,
> And hither and thither fly—
> Mere puppets they, who come and go

At bidding of vast formless things
That shift the scenery to and fro,
Flapping from out their Condor wings
Invisible Woe!

Poe and Whitman were both poets preoccupied with the thought of death, but, whereas Whitman forced himself to praise it, Poe was in revolt against it as the ultimate tyrant. He saw it as the one thing that made dreadful those enchanted islands, those enchanted valleys, those enchanted palaces in which, for him, so much of the beauty of the world took refuge. He could not reconcile himself to a world that was governed by mortality. There is the wistfulness of the exile from a lost Paradise running through his verse. He is essentially a man for whom the spiritual universe exists. His angels and demons may not resemble the angels and demons of the churches—may, indeed, be little more than formulæ in his dreamland. But they are at least the formulæ of a poet into whose dreams has come the rumour of immortality. He cannot believe that the City of Death, with its awful stillness, can last for ever —that city where

Shrines and palaces and towers
(Time-eaten towers that tremble not!)
Resemble nothing that is ours.

Around, by lifting winds forgot,
Resignedly beneath the sky
The melancholy waters lie.

He feels that somewhere Eldorado is to be found, as it is by the knight who sought it:

And as his strength
Failed him at length
He met a pilgrim shadow—
"Shadow," said he,
"Where can it be—
This land of Eldorado?"

"Over the Mountains
Of the Moon,
Down the Valley of the Shadow,
Ride, boldly ride,"
The shade replied—
"If you seek for Eldorado!"

It is true that his vision, whether of life or immortality, has something of the incoherence of the landscape of his "Dreamland":

Mountains toppling evermore
Into seas without a shore.

If his imagination passes "out of space, out of time," it is on the wings of trance rather than of faith. At the same time, his dreams would not have made so strong an appeal to generations of

readers if they had been mere sensational fancies, and had not seemed to wander in a wider universe than we are conscious of in our everyday life. They cannot be dismissed as the visions of a drugged man. They are the questionings of a spirit.

It may be that, like some of the decadents of Europe, Poe was preyed upon by a demon—that he was an outcast poet in whose sky was

> The cloud that took the form
> (When the rest of Heaven was blue)
> Of a demon in my view.

But in the best of the decadents the soul survived; and if they have a place in literature it is because they have left a record of the travels of the prodigal soul in a far country. Poe, though not sharing their decadence, is also the poet of a far country. That loveliest of his poems (if we except "Annabel Lee"), "To Helen"—what is it but a triumphant cry of return? Unlike "The Raven," it is a poem that never loses its beauty with repetition. "Annabel Lee" may be the fullest expression of his genius, but "To Helen" is the most exquisite. Even to write it down, hackneyed though it is, renews one's delight:

> Helen, thy beauty is to me
> Like those Nicean barks of yore,

That gently, o'er the perfumed sea,
The weary, way-born wanderer bore
To his own native shore.

On desperate seas long wont to roam,
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home
To the glory that was Greece
And the grandeur that was Rome.

Lo! in yon brilliant window-niche
How statue-like I see thee stand
The agate lamp within thy hand!
Ah, Psyche, from the regions which
Are Holy Land!

Here, as nowhere else, Poe achieved coherent and consummate grace of form. Here, if almost nowhere else, his talent was equal to his genius.

XV

HAWTHORNE

Hawthorne is the only American admitted into the English Men of Letters Series. This may be partly accidental, and due to the fact that it was possible to get so fine a critic as Henry James to write about him. It also suggests, however, that in 1879 Hawthorne was held in higher esteem than he is held to-day. There are several American writers about whom we are nowadays more curious. Emerson does not soar at quite such an altitude as he once did, but he is still an indubitable figure of genius on the sunny side of the clouds. Thoreau, with the challenge of his sardonic simplicity, will interest us so long as there is a society to protest against. Poe, after we have refined him in the fiercest fires of criticism, remains gold of the most precious. Whitman holds us as the giant aborigine of democracy as well as the rhapsodist of brotherhood and death. Washington Irving,

on the other hand, has disappeared except from the schoolbooks, and Oliver Wendell Holmes has ceased to be read by people under fifty. Longfellow has become an exiguous contributor to an anthology except in so far as he is taught, like Irving, to schoolchildren, and Lowell is oftener quoted by politicians than by critics of letters. There is no need to discuss just now whether this waning of reputations is likely to be permanent. It is enough to note that Hawthorne, though he has not waned to the extent that Longfellow has, has ceased for most readers to be a star of the first or second magnitude. How many critics would now place him, as he was once placed, among the great masters of English prose? How many editors of a series of lives of great writers would unhesitatingly include in it a life of Nathaniel Hawthorne?

Hawthorne may nevertheless justly be regarded as a classic, and there have been few writers whose short stories would bear re-reading so well as Hawthorne's three-quarters of a century after their first appearance. The prose, as anyone may see by dipping into Mr. Carl van Doren's admirable selection from *Twice-told Tales, Mosses from an Old Manse,* and *The Snow Image,* is beautiful prose, even if it falls short of supreme greatness. It flows with a

rhythm at once charming and forceful. It is transparent, and through it we can see life as Hawthorne's imagination played on it like sunlight refracted through water. He is a music-maker rather than a phrase-maker in his use of words. Movement is more to him than metaphor, though he can combine them attractively, as in the opening sentence of *The Seven Vagabonds:*

> Rambling on foot in the spring of my life and the summer of the year, I came one afternoon to a point which gave me the choice of three directions.

You may turn Hawthorne's pages almost at random, and you can scarcely help noticing example after example of this characteristic rhythm of his. It is noticeable even in such a simple narrative sentence as that with which *The Artist of the Beautiful* opens:

> An elderly man, with his pretty daughter on his arm, was passing along the street, and emerged from the gloom of the cloudy evening into the light that fell across the pavement from the window of a small shop.

And, again, we find it in a meditative passage such as:

> I saw mankind, in this weary old age of the world, either enduring a sluggish existence amid the smoke

> and dust of cities, or, if they breathed a purer air, still lying down at night with no hope but to wear out to-morrow, and all the to-morrows which make up life, among the same dull scenes and in the same wretched toil that had darkened the sunshine of to-day.

This all flows with something of the noble ease of hexameters, yet without falling into the vices of pseudo-poetic prose. The mere sound of his sentences gives Hawthorne's prose a wonderful momentum that keeps us interested even when at times we begin to wonder if his subject-matter is quite as interesting as it ought to be. This grave and equable momentum is one of his greatest technical qualities. It is a quality that cannot be adequately illustrated in single sentences or detached passages, because its success is not the success of occasional felicities but of something sustained and pervasive. It may even be imputed as a fault to Hawthorne that he can never, or almost never, escape from the equable rhythm of his prose. He seldom ends a story with the slightly different momentum due to an ending. It is not merely, however, that his stories end quietly: he is like a rider who rides beautifully but does not know how to dismount. He maintains his graceful ease of motion until the last moment, and then he slides off as best he can.

But it would be folly to regard Hawthorne's

rhythm as wholly—or even mainly—a technical quality. The rhythm of prose is never that, and it is in vain to play the sedulous ape to the great masters if nothing but their style is imitated. It is not an accident that the greatest English prose is to be found in the Bible. The rhythm of the greatest prose seems at times the rhythm of the spirit of man as it contemplates the life of men in the light of eternity. The rhythm to a Plato, a Milton, a Sir Thomas Browne, is inevitably of a kind that a Jane Austen or a Thackeray, with all their genius, could never achieve. It is the echo of the emotion felt by men to whom time and place are fables with another meaning besides that which appears on the surface. The realists can never write the greatest prose, because to them the world they see is not fabulous but a hard fact. The greatest writers all see the world as fabulous. Their men and women are inhabited by angels or devils, or, on a lower plane, have something of the nature of ghosts or fairies or goblins. If Othello were not a fable as well as a man, he would be no better than a criminal lunatic. If King Lear were not a fable as well as man, he would be a subject for the psycho-analyst. Imagine either of them as a modern Englishman, putting his case before a judge and jury, and you will see how the artist, even though

his characters as a rule are characters such as may be found in reality, must remove them out of and above reality into the region of fables in order to make them permanently real to the imagination. Dickens turned Victorian England into a myth peopled by goblins. Dostoievsky turned Russia into a myth peopled by goblins and demons. It is not that they denied the reality of the world before their eyes, but that they saw within it and about it another world apart from which it had very little meaning.

Hawthorne was a writer extremely conscious of this second world within and about the world. He had abandoned the Puritanical orthodoxy of his people, but none the less he was haunted like them by a sense of a second meaning in life beyond the surface meaning of the day's work and the day's play. Many of his stories are stories in which, as in *Young Goodman Brown,* everyday reality passes into fable and back again as swiftly as though the two worlds were but different stages in a transformation scene. His genius turned more naturally to allegory than any other writer's since Bunyan. This is generally counted a defect, and, indeed, if, instead of alternating the everyday world with the fabulous world, he had interwoven them in such a way that the world never became less real on account

of the fable it bore within it like an inner light, Hawthorne would have been a greater writer. At the same time, it is better that he should have sacrificed observation than that he should have sacrificed imagination. He lived in an atmosphere in which it must have been extraordinarily difficult to stand sufficiently remote from everyday life to see it not merely with the eye but with the imagination. To the eye, there must have been little enough of fantasy in the narrow lives of the men and women about him. "Never comes any bird of Paradise into that dismal region," he wrote of the Custom-house in which he passed so many years and that made "such havoc of his wits." He had to transform his surroundings into a strange land into which a bird of Paradise might enter. He did this by the invention of a sort of moral fairyland, into which he could project his vision of the mystery of human life. He often offends our sense of reality, but he never leaves us in doubt of the reality of this moral fairyland as the image of all he knew and felt about human life. It is a Puritanical fairyland into which sin has come. But, strong though his sense of sin is, Hawthorne does not always in his view of sin agree with the Puritans. He is more Christian, and he condemns the sin of self-righteousness more than

the sins of the flesh. Even so, his imagination is very close to that of the Puritans, who believed in witches and in men possessed by the Devil. The difference is that Hawthorne was inclined to believe that the good church-going people were also witches and men possessed by the Devil. Unless I misunderstand *Young Goodman Brown,* Hawthorne is here telling us how he was tempted to believe this, and reproaching himself for having given way to temptation. In *The Scarlet Letter,* the egoism of the vengeful husband, not the adultery of the wife or the cowardice of the minister who sins with her, is the unpardonable sin of the story. That Hawthorne's imaginative morality had the vehemence of genius is shown by the fact that *The Scarlet Letter* still holds us under its spell in days in which moral values have subtly and swiftly changed. People are no longer thrilled at the thought of a scarlet A on a woman's breast; they would scarcely be thrilled by the spectacle of a whole scarlet alphabet hung round a woman's neck like a collar. Yet Hawthorne's novel survives—a fable of the permanent and dubious warfare between good and evil, in which good changes its shape into that of evil, and evil is transmuted into good through suffering. His genius survives, like that of Hans Andersen,

because, not only does it carry the burden of morality, but it is led on its travels by a fancy wayward and caressing as the summer wind. He is the first prose myth-maker of America, and he has left no successors in his kind.

XVI

JONAH IN LANCASHIRE

The author of *Patience*—the other *Patience,* I mean, not the Gilbert opera—is beginning to be discovered even by the average reader. It is not long since we had modernised versions of his two most remarkable poems, *Pearl* and *Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight.* Gaston Paris describes the latter as " the jewel of English mediæval literature," and even among those who read idly for amusement it should become a favourite book in Mr. Ernest Kirtlan's easy rendering. Who the maker of these poems was we know not. Editors have invented a personal history for him, but other editors have ruthlessly pulled it to pieces. It was suggested that he wrote the romance *Sir Gawayne* in his gaudy youth. Then, having lost a child, he composed in *Pearl* a passionate lament for her. Afterwards, in the evening of his life, he wrote *Patience* as an expression of his submission to the will of God.

Mr. Bateson will have nothing to do either with this pathetic life-history or with the chronology. He regards *Patience* as the earliest of the poems, and is of the opinion that *Pearl,* far from being a lament for a lost child, is "largely a theological discussion in elegiac form." One would think there must be something seriously wrong in a poem about which a dispute of the kind could rage among the interpreters. But this is not necessarily so. No one denies that the *Song of Solomon* is a great poem, and yet men have quarrelled as to whether it should be read as the holiest of symbolic poems or as an early masterpiece of the fleshly school of literature. Coming to *Patience* itself, I fancy that the man who could discover personal confessions in it could discover personal confessions in Euclid. I find it difficult to believe in the bereaved father who turned for a lesson in resignation to the story of Jonah. It is the homilist, not the tortured human being, who fishes in the Book of Jonah for comfortable morals. *Patience* is a sermon addressed to other people, not to the poet's own soul. Feeling this, one may allow oneself to be amused by its quaintness as well as to admire the hue and vigour of its narrative.

Patience is the story of Jonah told by an original artist. Jonah is here painted in English

colours. He is the Jonah not of a tragic-hearted Hebrew but of a familiar Lancashire man who wrote in a Lancashire dialect at the time of Chaucer. Tertullian had written a Latin poem on the same theme, and Mr. Bateson gives us the text of this in an appendix, suggesting, as other scholars have done, that it is one of the sources of *Patience*. The Jonah of Tertullian, however, is a formal figure compared to the Jonah of the Englishman. Jonah in the old Lancashire poem is a lithe and live fellow from the moment at which he steps aboard the ship to make his escape from the perilous will of God.

Was neuer so joyful a Jue as Jonas was thenne,

we are told in a lively line at this point of the narrative. The storm that follows is described with such a sense of reality that it has been suggested that the poet himself must have experienced some such tempest when making a pilgrimage to Compostella, "the favourite journey of Englishmen at the time," and a journey of the ancient popularity of which we are still reminded in the streets of London once a year when children set up their grottoes on the footpaths as an excuse for begging pennies. Mr. Bateson attempts to bring home to us the desperate circumstances of seafaring in the Middle

Ages by quoting the statement that "John of Gaunt, on one occasion, was tossing about in the Channel for nine months, unable to land at Calais." I confess I cannot believe the story in this form, and we need no such incredible example to enable us to realise the terrors of the storm that swept down on Jonah, when the frightened sailors attempted to lighten the ship by throwing overboard

Her bagges, and her feather-beddes, and her bryght wedes.

The introduction of the feather-beds into the narrative would alone be a sufficient reason for welcoming the Lancashire version of the Jonah story. The description of the panic-stricken sailors "glewing," or calling, on their very various gods (who included Fernagu, a French giant) is another addition that pleases by its strangeness:

Bot vchon glewed on his god thet gayned hym beste;
Summe to Vernagu ther vouched avowes solemne,
Summe to Diana deuout, and derf Nepturne,
To Mahoun and to Mergot, the Mone and the Sunne.

Both in Tertullian and in *Patience* Jonah is made not only to sleep but to snore while the others pray during the storm. Tertullian puts it:

Sternentem inflata resonabat nare soporem.

The English poet writes still more vividly that Jonah lay in the bottom of the boat,

Slypped vpon a sloumbe-slepe, and sloberande he routes.

A "freke," or man, was sent to rouse him and to prepare him for the casting of lots:

The freke hym frunt with his fot, and bede hym ferk up.

Then came the casting of the lots:

And ay the lote, vpon laste, lymped on Jonas.

The sailors immediately began to upbraid Jonah in masculine English:

What the deuel hest thou don, dotede wrech?
What seches thou on see, synful schrewe,
With thy lastes [crimes] so luther [evil] to lose vus vchone?

Soon after follows the decision to throw him overboard:

Now is Jonas the Jwe jugged to drowne.

"A wylde walteande whale" comes up opportunely to the side of the boat:

And swyftely swenged hym to swepe, and his swallow opened . . . ,
With-outen towche of any tothe he tult in his throte.

In spite of his safe passage beyond the whale's teeth, however, Jonah's plight was not an enviable one:

Lorde! colde was his cumfort, and his care huge.

The poet describes him as passing down the throat like a "mote in at a minster door":

He glydes in by the gills . . . ;
Ay, hele ouer hed, hourlande aboute,
Til he blunt [staggered] in a blok as brod as a halle;
And ther he festnes the fete, and fathmes about,
And stod up in his stomak, that stank as the deuel.

So realistic is the description of the whale's inside that Mr. Bateson thinks it likely that the poet had been listening to the stories of whalers. He also endorses the poet's view of the horrors of the situation by quoting one writer who states that "the breath of the whale is frequently attended by such an insupportable smell as to bring on disorder of the brain." If the whale made Jonah feel sick, however, Jonah, according to the poet, had much the same effect on the whale. In a moving two lines on the whale's discomforts we are told:

For thet mote in his mawe made hym, I trowe,
Though hit lyttel were hym wyth, to wamel at his hert.

These two lines Mr. Bateson translates into colourless modern English: "For the mote made him—though it were little as compared with him —to feel sick," and adds for our information that "the reader of whaling stories will recall how frequently the whale suffers from dyspepsia!"

We need not follow the poet in detail through the rest of the narrative, which is full of life-giving detail till the end. After God had commanded the whale——

That he hym sput spakly vpon spare drye,

we see Jonah washing his muddy mantle on the beach and proceeding with his message of doom to the "burgesses and bachelors" of Nineveh. The gourd under which he sleeps becomes a "wodbynde" (some kind of convolvulus): it is "hedera," or ivy, in the Vulgate. Jonah's delight, as he lay under it—"so glad of his gay lodge"—is amusingly described. He——

Lys loltrande ther-inne lokande to toune.

So contentedly did he "loll" there, indeed—"so blithe of his wood-bine"—that he cared not a penny for any "diet" that day; and when it "nighed to night" and "nappe hym bihoued," he slept the sleep of the just "vnder leues." In

his account of Jonah's anger against God, and God's argument in favour of sparing Nineveh, the poet elaborates as ever the Bible narrative, and the appeal for the right of the inhabitants to live is tenderer than in the more concise original. God pleads, for instance, for the "lyttel bairnes on barme (breast) that neuer bale wrought," and the reference to "much cattle" becomes:

> And als ther ben doumbe bestes in the burgh many.

I do not suggest that *Patience* is better than the Book of Jonah, or as good, but that it has the vitality of an original work. The poet has a personal knowledge of character—a sense of drama, and a sense of life. Mr. Bateson's edition of the poem was first published seven years ago. He has now largely recast and rewritten it. I have taken some liberties with his text in quoting it, slightly modernising it in places. It is an edition for students of mediæval literature rather than for the general reader. But with the help of its excellent glossary others than scholars should be able to enjoy it if they are prepared to take a little pains. And it is worth taking pains to become acquainted with so vivid and robust a poet as the author of *Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight.*

INTERLUDE

THE CULT OF DULLNESS

Many conflicting opinions were expressed on the occasion of the Keats centenary, but everybody appeared to be unanimous on at least one point—contempt for the critics who told Keats to go back to his gallipots. We took it for granted that they were a very unusual sort of critics, and that, if a Keats were born to-day, we should give him a different sort of welcome. It is as though we had forgotten the history of literary genius and of its first reception into a jealous world. Human beings have naturally a profound respect for the great man, but they respect him most when he is dead. A dead demigod is to them infinitely better than a living lion. Their self-respect suffers if they have to live in the same world with some young fellow that overtops them. They feel, unconsciously, that by bringing him down they are raising themselves up. The Greeks pretended that it was the gods, and not themselves, who were jealous of human greatness, and they called this jealousy Nemesis. I suspect,

however, that it was human beings who first felt this passion for equality. It is not in this form a noble passion. It is a passion for being equal to the people above us, not for being equal to the people below. This is the passion that cannot forgive wit or beauty in a contemporary. Some men—the finest—are entirely without it. Further, most of us yield to facts and frankly recognise genius when there is no getting away from it. But there always remains a company of the dull and the crabbed who believe till the end that to disparage a good writer is to be, at least on this point, superior to him. They are afraid that if the world welcomes this wit and beauty it will have no welcome for their own dullness. That is the secret fear that is a cause of a great deal of the worst sort of bad criticism. There is a league of dullness constantly making war on wit and beauty. Its malice is not deliberate: it is scarcely intelligent enough to be deliberate. It is founded not on reason, but on the instinct of self-defence.

It is difficult, I admit, to say how far the disparagement of good writing is the result of mere stupidity and how far it is the result of malignity. The longer one lives, the more one is amazed at the incredible achievements of human stupidity.

Possibly, then, the critics who attempted to

drag down Keats to the level of bad writers were merely ordinary stupid human beings—good men in the bosoms of their families, but fools anywhere else. They had, after all, standards to which Keats did not conform. They had either to abuse Keats or to trample on their standards —which would have been like trampling on themselves. Keats himself, by the vehemence of his attack on Pope and his followers, had provoked the controversial spirit. He was to them a blasphemer in the temple, who had to be punished at all costs. There is much the same reason, no doubt, for the virulence with which the dull have assailed the wits in all ages. Wit by its very nature is a declaration of war not only on dullness, but on the dull orthodoxies, and the dull and the orthodox return bite for blow. Molière brought great trouble on his head by being witty. He held the mirror up to fools, and in answer the fools baited him. He had not all the critics against him, but only all the stupid critics. That is a distinction that should always be remembered in any discussion on literary criticism. Many writers, wearied by the slings and arrows of outrageous critics, have settled down into the easy conviction that all criticism is a waste of words. Disraeli dismissed the whole brood of critics in the saying that critics are those who have failed in

literature. This, of course, is a libel on a reputable art. The success of such critics as Mr. Saintsbury and Mr. Gosse is literary success as desirable as that of most poets or novelists. At the same time, there is a half-truth in the saying of Disraeli. There is no critic who does more injury to the reputation of his art than the embittered failure—the man who has shouted in the world's ear and has yet not made himself heard. To speak to a deaf man makes some people angry: to speak to a deaf world has the same effect on many writers. Nature is kind, and she enables writers of this sort to deceive themselves into thinking that their ill-natured egoism is a sort of divine anger on behalf of great art. Their self-righteousness masks itself as literary piety. Coleridge a hundred years ago noticed the irritability of minor poets—"men of undoubted talents but not of genius," whose tempers are "rendered yet more irritable by their desire to *appear* men of genius." That is the irritation that is the cause of so much bad criticism. The critic who feels irritated should begin to suspect himself, and ask himself whether it is the excellences or the faults of the work he is criticising that have put him in a temper. We are often told in these days that criticism is too gentle. In a world in which such a mass of criticism is being written it is difficult

to sum up the tendencies of the whole period in a phrase. There may be an excess of unintelligent praise, but there is also, it seems to me, an excess of unintelligent carping and ill-tempered denigration. The present age, like Coleridge's, might be described as "this age of personality, this age of literary and political gossiping, when the meanest insects are worshipped with a sort of Egyptian superstition, if only the brainless head be atoned for by the sting of personal malignity in the tail."

Not that even men of genius have always been just to each other. Byron was unjust to Shakespeare and Keats: Keats was unjust to Pope. But we do not demand sound criticism as a right from a great poet, who may easily feel the partiality of a specialist. The meanness of the mean critic is of quite another sort. He is a fox without a tail, who could only feel important in a world of foxes without tails. He is always in search of a standard according to which even he will have a chance of seeming great. That is why in every generation good writers are attacked and dull writers are exalted by this sort of critic. The cult of the dull, of the mediocre, is necessary in order that he, too, may win some reverence. The whole thing is, it seems to me, a pathetic delusion. The critic may for a time

organise fame for dull painters and dull writers, and he may win a year's or ten years' praise by doing so. But all the time he is losing that generous and disinterested spirit which is one of the most precious possessions of the artist. The ordinary writer sets out with the hope of qualifying for a place in the temple of fame: he ends too often by merely qualifying for a place in the *Dunciad*. He may be a man of one talent, which would serve well enough if put to proper uses, but he prefers to hide it and to pretend that it is ten, railing all the while at others on the ground that they have only five. I used to think that it was un-Christian of the Founder of Christianity to give the man with one talent so poor a name compared to the man with five or the man with ten. But I have long since come to see that in doing so he spoke out of a profound knowledge of human nature. The man with one talent is the most likely of all to make no use of it. He does not see that even his poverty may be turned into riches, as is obvious when one remembers such Lilliputian and immortal poets as Lovelace. He is blinded by a sense of his insignificance. He has the false humility of the frog, which is not content to be a first-rate frog but must try to swell itself into a bull.

The spectacle of the bad critic would be matter for pity were it not that he has some influence on the immediate fate of good writers. He cannot prevent the recognition of a Keats, but he can delay it. "Mr. Hunt," said *Blackwood's,* "is a small poet, but he is a clever man. Mr. Keats is a still smaller poet, and he is only a boy of pretty abilities, which he has done everything in his power to spoil. . . . We venture to make one small prophecy, that his bookseller will not a second time venture £50 upon anything he can write." The attacks on Keats, it has been contended, were animated by political rather than literary rivalry. But, whatever their origin, they were a crime against the spirit of disinterestedness, which is the holy spirit of criticism. Niggardliness with praise is as shabby a vice as niggardliness with money, and I have often noticed that the man who is a miser with the one is a miser with the other. It is the most unattractive form of selfishness. The critics, however, did not write down Keats: they succeeded only in writing down themselves. And yet, every now and then, we find someone clamouring for a return of the good old days of *Blackwood's* and the *Quarterly.* Are our own days, then, lacking in "foolish, trivial, almost ostentatiously dishonest" criticism? It would be pleasant to think so. But

I suspect that folly and dishonesty have not disappeared but have merely changed their style. What is needed in criticism to-day, as always, is the sympathetic imagination. A fool with a sledge-hammer is of no service to literature. We need the comic sense to laugh at folly, the moral sense to make war on cant. There is no need for wrath in criticism except in presence of pretentiousness. The pretentious is the grand enemy of literature as of religion. But in regard to the small sins of literature, we may as well cultivate the same tolerance that a good-natured man feels towards the small sins of life. To be tolerant is not to resign either one's moral or artistic standards. The greatest moralists of the world have been the most tolerant. Intolerance, indeed, is only a part of the general cult of dullness. It would confine the arts to a coterie, and steal Shakespeare himself from the world at large, on the ground that the world cannot appreciate him. It would turn literature into a pedantic mystery, and make an end of it as a noble entertainment. But, alas, intolerance and dullness are immortal, and we shall always have a war between them, on the one hand, and the Keatses and the Molières on the other. And the Keatses and the Molières will go on writing, and it may be that they would not be so firmly rooted if it were not for the fierce

wind of stupid words that so constantly assails them. All may be for the best. Without dullness to contend against, beauty and wit might succumb to Capua.

MORE OR LESS MODERN

I

MR. MAX BEERBOHM

1. THE STUDENT OF PERFECTION

Mr. Max Beerbohm generally leaves us with the impression that he has written something perfect. He is, indeed, one of those writers to whom perfection is all-important, not only on account of their method, but on account of their subject matter. He is not a man engaged in a Laocoon struggle with his imagination—a man desperately at grips with a tremendous theme. He is more comparable to a laundress than to Laocoon. His work has the perfection of a starched shirt-front, which if it is not perfect is nothing. Mr. Beerbohm takes what may be called an evening-dress view of life. One would not be surprised to learn that he writes in evening dress. He has that air of good conversation without intimacy, of deliberate charm, of cool and friendly brilliance that always shows at its best above a shining and expressionless shirt-front. He belongs to

the world in which it is good form to forget the passions, except for their funny side, and in which the persiflage is more indispensable than the port. Not much good literature has been written in this spirit in England. The masterpieces of persiflage in English literature are, in verse, *The Rape of the Lock* and, in prose, *The Importance of Being Earnest.* Can anybody name three other masterpieces in the same kind? Everyone who reads *Seven Men* can name one. It is called *Seven Men.*

Mr. Beerbohm is, in the opinion of some good critics, best of all as a parodist. His *Christmas Garland* contains the finest prose parodies in the language. And, even outside his confessed parodies, he remains a parodist in the greater part of his work. In *Seven Men* he is both a parodist of Henry James and a caricaturist of men of letters. Henry James loved to take a man of letters as his hero: Mr. Beerbohm loves to take a man of letters as a figure of fun. His men of letters have none of that dignity with which they are invested in "The Death of a Lion." They are simply people to tell amusing stories about, as monarchs and statesmen become at a dinner-table. This does not mean that Mr. Beerbohm is not a devoted disciple of literature. There is a novelist, Maltby, in one of his stories, who lives in the suburbs and

writes a successful novel about aristocratic life, and afterwards writes an unsuccessful novel about suburban life. "I suppose," he says, explaining his failure, "one can't really understand what one doesn't love, and one can't make good fun without real understanding." We may reasonably take this as Mr. Beerbohm's own apologia. He has a sincere tenderness for this world he derides. In *A Christmas Garland* he protests his admiration for the victims of his parodies. And as we read *Seven Men* we feel sure that it is his extreme devotion to the world of letters that leads him to choose it as the theme of his mockery. When he writes of men of letters —especially of the exquisitely minor men of letters—he is like a man speaking his own language in his own country. When he wanders outside the world of authors he writes under a sense of limitations, like a man venturing into a foreign tongue. In *Seven Men* the least remarkable of the five stories—though it, too, would seem remarkable in any less brilliant company—is "James Pethel," the story of a financier, who lives for the sake of risks and who is happiest when he is risking not only himself but those he loves—his daughter, for instance, or a favourite author. The description of a motor drive, on which he takes his wife and daughter and Mr.

Beerbohm in Normandy, with its many hair-breadth escapes, is an excellent piece of comico-sensational literature. But the story reads like hearsay, not like reminiscences of a man's own world. One does not believe that Pethel ever existed, or that he enjoyed drinking water in France simply because there was a risk of typhoid. Even the motor drive is not quite "convincing." Or, perhaps, one should say that, while the motor drive itself is immensely convincing, James Pethel's state of mind as he drives the car is not. Henry James might have made of him a queer study in morbid psychology. Mr. Beerbohm has hardly raised him above the level of a joke. It lacks the thrill of masterly and intimate portraiture. "A. V. Laider" is another story with a non-literary theme. It is, perhaps, the most refined example of leg-pulling in fiction. It is one of those stories in which the reader is worked up to a moment of intense horror only to be let down with mockery by the narrator. Everything in it is perfectly done—the grey introduction at the rainy seaside, the railway accident foreseen in the palms of several of the passengers, and the final confession and comment. If not a man of letters, A. V. Laider is at least a man of imagination, and Mr. Beerbohm knows the type.

As to which of Mr. Beerbohm's burlesque

portraits of authors is the best, opinions quite properly differ. The votes that "Savonarola" Brown loses for the burlesque of his personality he wins back again for the burlesque of his play. Brown was a dramatist who chose his subject on a novel principle. He originally thought of writing a tragedy about Sardanapalus, but on looking this up in the Encyclopædia his eye fell on "Savonarola," and what he read interested him. He did not allow himself to be hampered, however, by historical facts, but adopted the policy of allowing his characters to live their own lives. In the result his blank-verse tragedy introduces us to most of the famous and infamous figures in Italian history. Had Brown lived to finish the fifth act, there is no doubt that he would have introduced Garibaldi—perhaps even D'Annunzio —into his coruscating pageant. He has certainly achieved the most distinguished list of *dramatis personæ* ever crowded into a brief play. The play as we now possess it can hardly be described as a parody. At least, it is not a parody on any particular play. It makes fun at the expense not only of the worst writer of blank verse now living, but of Shakespeare himself. It is like one of those burlesque operas that were popular thirty years ago, and some of the speeches might have been stolen from *Julius Cæsar Up-to-Date*. The

opening scene introduces us not only to a Friar and a Sacristan (wigged by Clarkson), but to Savonarola, Dante, Lucrezia Borgia, Leonardo da Vinci, and St. Francis of Assisi. Savonarola, on seeing Lucrezia, cries, "Who is this wanton?" St. Francis, with characteristic gentleness, reproves him:

> Hush, Sir! 'tis my little sister
> The poisoner, right well-beloved by all
> Whom she as yet hath spared.

The central interest of the play is the swaying intensity of the love of the poisoner and Savonarola. In his passion Savonarola at one moment discards the monkish frock for the costume of a Renaissance nobleman. But the sight of his legs temporarily kills Lucrezia's feeling for him. She scornfully bids him:

> Go pad thy calves!
> Thus mightst thou just conceivably with luck
> Capture the fancy of some serving-wench.

This being too much for him, they part in the mood of revenge, and, after Lucrezia has made a desperate effort to force a poisoned ring on him, they both find themselves in gaol. When the curtain rises on Savonarola's cell, he has been in prison three hours. "Imprisonment," says the

stage direction, "has left its mark on both of them. Savonarola's hair has turned white. His whole aspect is that of a very old, old man. Lucrezia looks no older than before, but has gone mad." How like nine-tenths of the prison scenes one has seen on the stage! But never on the stage has one heard a prison soliloquy half so fine as Savonarola's, from its opening sentence:

> Alas, how long ago this morning seems
> This evening!—

down to its close:

> What would my sire have said,
> And what my dam, had anybody told them
> The time would come when I should occupy
> A felon's cell? O the disgrace of it!—
> The scandal, the incredible come-down!
> It masters me. I see i' my mind's eye
> The public prints—"Sharp Sentence on a Monk!"
> What then? I thought I was of sterner stuff
> Than is affrighted by what people think.
> Yet thought I so because 'twas thought of me;
> And so 'twas thought of me because I had
> A hawk-like profile and a baleful eye.
> Lo! my soul's chin recedes, soft to the touch
> As half-churn'd butter. Seeming hawk is dove,
> And dove's a gaolbird now. Fie, out upon 't!

I do not think that anyone has produced a more

unforgettable line of heroic decasyllabic verse than:

> The scandal, the incredible come-down!

Savonarola's fame will be increased as a result of that exquisitely inappropriate line. It is infinitely regrettable that Brown did not live to write the fifth act of his masterpiece. Mr. Beerbohm has attempted a scenario for a fifth act, and it contains many admirable things. But Mr. Beerbohm lacks Brown's "magnifical" touch, though he does his best to imitate it in the lines in which he makes Lucrezia say that she means:

> To start afresh in that uncharted land
> Which austers not from out the antipod,
> Australia!

Good as this is, it seems just to verge on parody. It is grotesque where Brown would have been moving. The play as a whole, however, will find a place among the minor classics. It is far, far better than going to the pantomime. It is as good as the pantomime ought to be.

"Maltby and Braxton" is something new in literature—a comic ghost story. There are plenty of funny stories about ghosts that did not exist. This is a funny story about a ghost that did exist. It is a story of the jealousy of two novelists of the 'nineties, and tells how one of them was pursued

by the ghost of his jealous rival to a week-end at a duchess's. It is a nightmare seen objectively—everybody's nightmare.

In "Enoch Soames"—which is the masterpiece of the book—Mr. Beerbohm fools, but he fools wisely. He never takes his eye off human nature. He draws not only a caricature, but a man. The minor poet—the utterly incompetent minor poet—has never before been drawn so brilliantly and with so much intelligence as in "Enoch Soames." The pretentiousness, the inclination to disparage, the egotism, the affected habits and beliefs—bad poets (and some less bad ones) have had them in all ages, but the type has not before been collected and pinned in a glass case. "Enoch Soames" is a perfect fable for egotists. It might be described as a sympathetic exposure. One feels almost sorry for Soames as Mr. Beerbohm subjects him to the terrible justice of the comic imagination. "Enoch Soames" is a moral tale into which the Devil himself enters as a character. Mr. Beerbohm made his reputation as an eccentric writer. In this story he suggests an attitude the reverse of eccentric. Perhaps it is that middle-age has descended on him. He has certainly added wisdom to playfulness, and in the result has painted an imaginary portrait which is as impressively serious as it is brilliantly entertaining.

2. "MAX" IN DANGER

Mr. Beerbohm is in danger of being canonised. Critics may quarrel about him, but it is only because the wreaths get in the way of one another, and every critic thinks that his should be on top. They have even discovered that "Max" has a heart. "Max" may plead that it is only a little one, but that will not save him. Some other critic will discover that he has a message, and someone else will announce that he has a metaphysic. In order to avert this unseemly canonisation—or, at least, to keep it within the bounds of reason—one would like to adopt the ungracious part of *advocatus diaboli* and state the case against "Max" in the strongest possible terms. But, alas! one finds that there is nothing to say against him, except that he is not Shakespeare or Dr. Johnson.

One of the charms of Mr. Beerbohm is that he never pretends to be what he is not. He knows as well as anybody that he is not an oak of the forest, but a choice bloom grown from seed in a greenhouse, and even now lord of a pot rather than of a large garden. His art, at its best, is praise of art, not praise of life. Without the arts, the world would be meaningless to him. If he rewrote the plays of Shakespeare, he would make Hamlet a man who lacked the will to write the

last chapter of a masterpiece, and Othello an author who murdered his wife because her books sold better than his, and King Lear a tedious old epic poet who perpetually recited his own verse till his daughters were able to endure it no longer and locked him out for the night. Cordelia, for her part, would be a sweet little creature, whose love for the old man was stronger than her literary sense, and who would slip out of a window and join him where he stamped up and down in the shrubbery, tripping over the bushes, cursing her more fastidious sisters, and booming out his bad verse to her and the rain. Mr. Beerbohm's world is exclusively populated by authors, save for a few painters, sculptors, actors, musicians, and people who do not matter. One has to include the people who do not matter, because otherwise one's generalisation would not be true.

Most people are agreed that Mr. Beerbohm's recent work is his best. Consider his last three books, then, and how little of them could have come into existence, save in a world of authors. *A Christmas Garland,* his masterpiece, is a book of prose parodies on authors. *Seven Men*—yes, that, too, is his masterpiece—is a book in which every character that one remembers is an author or, at least, a liar. There were Enoch Soames with his poems, Ladbroke Brown with the

BEAU-tiful play (as Swinburne would have said) on Savonarola, and the rival novelists of that adventurous week-end with the aristocracy. And in his last book, *And Even Now,* we find once more a variegated human comedy in which all the principal characters are authors and artists or their works, and other human beings are only allowed to walk on as supers. First of all we have "A Relic," in which Mr. Beerbohm sees a pretty lady in a temper, and a short, fat man waddling after her, and determines to write a story about them. He does not write it, but he writes a story about the story he did not write. Then comes "How Shall I Word It?"—a joke about a "complete letter-writer" bought at a railway bookstall. This is followed by "Mobled King," describing a statue to King Humbert, which, though erected, has never been unveiled because the priests and the fishermen object, and concluding with a wise suggestion that "there would be no disrespect, and there would be no violence, if the bad statues familiar to London were ceremoniously veiled, and their inscribed pedestals left just as they are." Fourth comes "Kolniyatch"—a spoof account of the "very latest thing" in Continental authors. Few of us have read Kolniyatch in "the original Gibrisch," but Mr. Beerbohm's description of his work and per-

sonality makes it clear that he was an author compared with whom Dostoievsky and Strindberg were serene and saccharine:

> Of the man himself—for on several occasions I had the privilege and the permit to visit him—I have the pleasantest, most sacred memories. His was a wonderfully vivid and intense personality. The head was beautiful, perfectly conic in form. The eyes were like two revolving lamps, set very close together. The smile was haunting. There was a touch of old-world courtesy in the repression of the evident impulse to spring at one's throat.

After this comes "No. 2, The Pines"—yes, this is Mr. Beerbohm's masterpiece, too. Everybody writes well about Swinburne, but Mr. Beerbohm writes better than anybody else—better, if possible, even than Mr. Lucas. What other writer could drive respect and mockery tandem with the same delicate skill? Mr. Beerbohm sees the famous Putney household not only with the comic sense, but through the eyes of a literary youth introduced for the first time into the presence of immortals. The Pines may be a Lewis-Carroll Wonderland, but it is still a wonderland, as he recalls that first meal at the end of the long table —"Watts-Dunton between us very low down over his plate, very cosy and hirsute, and rather like the Dormouse at that long tea-table which

Alice found in Wonderland. I see myself sitting there wide-eyed, as Alice sat. And, had the Hare been a great poet, and the Hatter a great gentleman, and neither of them mad but each one only very odd and vivacious, I might see Swinburne as a glorified blend of those two."

"A Letter that Was Not Written," again, is a comedy of the arts, relating to the threatened destruction of the Adelphi. "Books within Books" is a charming speculation on books written by characters in fiction, not the least desirable of which, surely, was "Poments: Being Poems of the Mood and the Moment"—a work that made a character in a forgotten novel deservedly famous. The next essay, "The Golden Drugget," may seem by its subject—the beam of light that falls from an open inn-door on a dark night—to be outside the literary-and-artistic formula, but is it not essentially an argument with artists that the old themes are best—that this "golden drugget" of light would somehow make a better picture than Smithkins' *Façade of the Waldorf Hotel by Night, in Peace Time?* Similarly, "Hosts and Guests," though it takes us perilously near the borderland of lay humanity, is essentially a literary causerie. Mr. Beerbohm may write on hosts and describe the pangs of an impoverished host in one of the "more distinguished

restaurants" as he waits and wonders what the amount of the bill will be; but the principal hosts and hostesses of whom he writes are Jael and Circe and Macbeth and Old Wardle. "A Point to be Remembered by Very Eminent Men," the essay that follows, contains advice to great authors as to how they should receive a worshipper who is to meet them for the first time. The author should not, Mr. Beerbohm thinks. be in the room to receive him, but should keep him waiting a little, though not so long as Leigh Hunt kept young Coventry Patmore, who had been kicking his heels for two hours when his host appeared "rubbing his hands and smiling ethereally, and saying, without a word of preface or notice of my having waited so long, 'This is a beautiful world, Mr. Patmore!' "

There is no need to make the proof of the literary origins of "Max" more detailed. The world that he sees in the mirror of literature means more to Mr. Beerbohm than the world itself that is mirrored. The only human figure that attracts him greatly is the man who holds the mirror up. He does not look in his heart and write. He looks in the glass and writes. The parts of nature and art, as Landor gave them, will have to be reversed for Mr. Beerbohm's epitaph. For him, indeed, nature seems hardly

to exist. For him no birds sing, and he probably thinks that the scarlet pimpernel was invented by Baroness Orczy. His talent is urban and, in a good sense, prosaic. He has never ceased to be a dramatic critic, indeed, observing the men created by men (and the creators of those men) rather than the men created by God. He is a spectator, and a spectator inside four walls. He is, indeed, the last of the æsthetes. His æstheticism, however, is comic æstheticism. If he writes an unusual word, it is not to stir our imaginations with its beauty, but as a kind of dandyism, reminding us of the care with which he dresses his wit.

Within his own little world—so even the devil's advocate would have to end by admitting—Mr. Beerbohm is a master. He has done a small thing perfectly, and one perfect quip will outlive ten bad epics. It is not to be wondered at that people already see the first hint of wings sprouting from his supremely well-tailored shoulders. He is, indeed, as immortal as anybody alive. He will flit through eternity, not as an archangel, perhaps, but as a mischievous cherub in a silk hat. He is cherub enough already always to be on the side of the angels. Those who declared that he had a heart were not mistaken. There is at least one note of tenderness in the peal of his

mockery. There is a spirit of courtesy and considerateness in his writing, noticeable alike in "No. 2, The Pines," and in the essay on servants. Thus, though he writes mainly on the arts and artists, he sees in them, not mere figures of ornament, but figures of life, and expresses through them clearly enough—I was going to say his attitude to life. He is no parasite at the table of the arts, indeed, but a guest with perfect manners, at once shy and brilliant, one who never echoes an opinion dully, but is always amusingly himself. That accounts for his charm. Perfect manners in literature are rare nowadays. Many authors are either pretending or condescending, either malicious or suspicious. "Max" has all the virtues of egotism without any of its vices.

II

MR. ARNOLD BENNETT CONFESSES

Mr. Bennett is at once a connoisseur and a card. He not only knows things but has an air of knowing things. He lets you know that he is "in the know." He has a taking way of giving information as though it were inside information. He is the man of genius as tipster. In *Things That Have Interested Me* he gives us tips about painting, music, literature, acting, war, politics, manners and morals. He never hesitates: even when he is hinting about the future, he seems to do it with a nod that implies, "You may take my word for it." There was never a less speculative author. Mr. Wells precipitates himself into eternity or the twenty-first century in search of things that really matter. Mr. Bennett is equally inquisitive, but he is inquisitive in a different way and almost entirely about his own time. Where Mr. Wells speculates, Mr. Bennett finds out, and, "when found, makes a note." He gives one the impression of a man with a

passion for buttonholing experts. He could interest himself for a time in any expert—an expert footballer or an expert Civil Servant or an expert violinist or an expert washerwoman. He likes to see the wheels of contemporary life—even the smallest wheel—at work, and to learn the secrets of the machine. His attitude to life is suggested by the fact that he has written a book called *The Human Machine,* and that it is inconceivable that he should write a book called *The Human Soul.* This is not to deny Mr. Bennett's vivid imaginative interest in things. It is merely to point out that it is the interest not of a mystic but of a contemporary note-taker. That is the circle within which his genius works, and it is a genius without a rival of its kind in the literature of our time. He pursues his facts with something of the appetite of a Boswell, though more temperately. He has common sense where Boswell was a fool, however. Mr. Bennett, finding that even a glass of champagne and, perhaps, a spoonful of brandy taken regularly had the effect of clogging his "own particular machine," decided to drink no alcohol at all. Boswell might have taken the same decision, but he could not have kept to it. Mr. Bennett, none the less, is as fantastic in his common sense as was Boswell in his folly. Each of them is a fantastic button-

holer. It is this element in him that raises Mr. Bennett so high above all the other more or less realistic writers of his time.

Things That Have Interested Me is a book of confessions that could have been written by no other living man. His style—perky, efficient, decisive—is the echo of a personality. What other critic of the arts would express his enthusiasm for great painting just like this?

> It was fortunate for Turner that Girtin died early. He might have knocked spots off Turner. And, while I am about the matter, I may as well say that I doubt whether Turner was well advised in having his big oil-paintings hung alongside of Claude's in the National Gallery. The ordeal was the least in the world too severe for them. Still, I would not deny that Turner was a very great person.

Such a paragraph, with its rapid series of terse judgments, is defiantly interesting. It is not only the "You may take it from me" attitude that fascinates us: it is the "me" from whom you may take it. It is an excited "me" as well as a cocksure "me." Mr. Bennett is an enthusiast, as you may see when, writing of Brabazon, he affirms:

> In my opinion his "Taj Mahal" is the finest water-colour *sketch* ever done. He probably did it in about a quarter of an hour.

Or, turning to literature, he will tell you:

> Similarly will a bond be created if you ask a man where is the finest modern English prose and he replies: "In *The Revolution in Tanner's Lane.*"

Mr. Bennett is always hunting the superlative. He wants the best of everything, and he won't be happy till he tells you where you can get it. It is true that he says: "Let us all thank God that there is no 'best short story.'" But that is only because there are several, and Mr. Bennett, one suspects, knows them all. "I am not sure," he says on this point, "that any short stories in English can qualify for the championship." Yet I fancy the editor of a collection of the world's best short stories would have to consider a good deal of Mr. Conrad, Mr. Wells's *Country of the Blind,* and Mr. Bennett's own *Matador of the Five Towns.*

Mr. Bennett's chase of the superlative is not confined to the arts. He demands superlative qualities even in barbers. He has submitted his head to barbers in many of the countries of Europe, and he gives the first prize to the Italians. "Italian barbers," he declares, "are greater than French, both in quality and in numbers." At the same time, taking barbers not in nations but as individuals, he tells us: "The finest artist I

know or have known is nevertheless in Paris. His life has the austerity of a monk's." Judging them by nations, he gives Denmark a "highly commended":

> I like Denmark because there some of the barbers' shops have a thin ascending jet of water whose summit just caresses the bent chin, which, after shaving, is thus laved without either the repugnant British sponge or the clumsy splashing practised in France and Italy.

He knows about it all: he knows; he knows. And, knowing so much, he is in all the better position to censure a certain British barber who parted his hair on the wrong side:

> When he came back he parted my hair on the wrong side—sure sign of an inefficient barber. He had been barbering for probably twenty years and had not learnt that a barber ought to notice the disposition of a customer's hair before touching it. He was incapable, but not a bad sort.

And Mr. Bennett, even though he is perilously near being a teetotaller, can discourse to you as learnedly on drinks as on ways of getting your hair cut. "Not many men," he says, "can talk intelligently about drink, but far more can talk intelligently about drink than about food." He himself is one of the number, as witness:

> There was only one wine at that dinner, Bollinger, 1911, a wine that will soon be extinct. It was perfect, as perfect as the cigars. . . . We decided that no champagne could beat it, even if any could equal it, and I once again abandoned the belief, put into me by certain experts, that the finest 1911 champagnes were Krug and Duc de Montebello.

One of the especial charms of Mr. Bennett as a writer is that he talks about painters and barbers, about champagne and short stories, in exactly the same tone and with the same seriousness, and measures them, so far as one can see, by the same standard. Indeed, he discusses epic poetry in terms of food.

> All great epics are full of meat and are juicy side-dishes, if only people will refrain from taking them as seriously as porridge. *Paradise Lost* is a whole picnic menu, and its fragments make first-rate light reading.

To write like this is to give effect of paradox, even when one is talking common sense. It is clear that Mr. Bennett does it deliberately. He does it as an efficient artist, not as a bungler. He fishes for our interest with a conscious *gaucherie* of phrase, as when he ends his reference to the novels of Henry James with the sentence: "They lack ecstasy, guts."

One of the most amusing passages in the book

is that in which Mr. Bennett leaves us with a portrait of himself as artist in contrast to Henry James, the writer of "pot-boilers." It hardly needs saying that in doing this Mr. Bennett is making no extravagant claims for himself, but is merely getting in a cunning retort to some of his "highbrow" critics. The comparison between his own case and that of James refers only to one point, and arises from the fact that James wrote plays with the sole object of making money. On this Mr. Bennett comments:

> Somebody of realistic temperament ought to have advised James that to write plays with the sole object of making money is a hopeless enterprise. I tried it myself for several years, at the end of which I abandoned the stage for ever. I should not have returned to it, had not Lee Mathews of the Stage Society persuaded me to write a play in the same spirit as I was writing novels. It was entirely due to him that I wrote *Cupid and Commonsense*. Since then I have never written a play except for my own artistic satisfaction.

Nor, one feels, did he write even the casual jottings on life and the arts in *Things that Have Interested Me* for any other reason than that it pleased him to do it. The jottings vary in quality from ephemeral social and political comment to sharply-realised accounts of "things seen," vivid notes of self-analysis, confessions of

the tastes and experiences of an epicure of life with a strong preference for leaving the world better than he found it. Mr. Bennett gives us here a jigsaw portrait of himself. We can reconstruct it from the bits—a man shy and omniscient, simple and ostentatious, Beau Nash from the Five Towns.

III

MR. CONRAD AT HOME

Mr. Conrad is nothing of a peacock. You may stare at him as long as you like, but he will never respond with a sudden spread of gorgeous vanities. He is more like some bird that takes on the protective colouring of the earth and delights in avoiding rather than in attracting the prying eye. Flatter him as you will; call him a phœnix or a bird of paradise: he may be secretly pleased but he will only croak gruffly in reply, "To have the gift of words is no such great matter." He does not know how to play up to our inquisitive admiration. We may think, as when we take up *A Personal Record,* that now at last we have caught him in a position in which he is bound to show us his fine feathers. But it is a vain hope. Glimpses we get—amazing glimpses—but never the near and detailed spectacle we desire. He protests that he is no cynic, but is he sure that he does not find a cynical

amusement in tantalising our curiosity? Otherwise, would he have written in the preface to *Notes on Life and Letters* that "perhaps it will do something to help towards a better vision of the man, if it gives no more than a partial view of a piece of his back, a little dusty (after the process of tidying-up), a little bowed, and receding from the world not because of weariness or misanthropy, but for other reasons that cannot be helped"? It may be that Mr. Conrad can suggest more enticing mysteries by a portrait of a piece of an author's back than other writers can by a full-length representation, showing the polish on the boots and the crease in the trousers. In art the half (or very much less) is greater than the whole. Still, Mr. Conrad's principal object in showing us the back is that it may leave us unsatisfied and speculating. He does not intend to satisfy us. It is as though he had written on the title-page of his autobiography: "Thus far and no further."

At the same time, if he tells little about himself, he does not escape giving himself away in his admiration for other men. He has an artistic faith that breaks into his sentences as soon as he begins to talk of Henry James or Maupassant or Turgenev. Not that he belongs to any school in literature: he hates all references to schools.

He becomes sullenly hostile if anyone attempts to classify authors as romantics, realists, naturalists, etc. Every great author is for him a man, not a formula. He can hardly mention the word "formula" without disgust. "No secret of eternal life for our books," he declares, "can be found among the formulas of art, any more than for our bodies in a prescribed combination of drugs." Again, "the truth is, that more than one kind of intellectual cowardice hides behind the literary formulas." And once more, in speaking of the good artist: "It is in the impartial practice of life, if anywhere, that the promise of perfection for his art can be found, rather than in the absurd formulas trying to prescribe this or that particular method of technique or conception." This may suggest to the pedantic that Mr. Conrad has no critical standards, and he certainly prefers to portray an author rather than to measure him with a tape as if for a suit of clothes. And he is right; for to portray an author truthfully is to measure him in a far profounder sense than can be done with a tape run round his waist, and down the side of his leg. Mr. Conrad's quest is the soul of his author. If it be a noble soul, he has a welcome for it, as Plutarch had in his biographies. He may not agree with Maupassant's deterministic view of

life, but he salutes Maupassant in passing with the remark: "The worth of every conviction consists precisely in the steadfastness with which it is held." His first demand of an author is truth—not absolute truth, but the truth that is in him. "At the heart of fiction," he declares, "even the least worthy of the name, some sort of truth can be found—if only the truth of a childish theatrical ardour in the game of life, as in the novels of Dumas the father."

Mr. Conrad, indeed, claims for fiction that it is nearer truth than history, agreeing more or less on this point with Aristotle and Schopenhauer:

> Fiction is history, human history, or it is nothing. But it is also more than that; it stands on firmer ground, being based on the reality of forms and the observation of social phenomena, whereas history is based on documents, and the reading of print and handwriting —on second-hand impression. Thus fiction is nearer truth. But let that pass. An historian may be an artist, too, and a novelist is an historian, the preserver, the keeper, the expounder, of human experience.

I confess I dislike this contention among the various literary forms—poetry, fiction, history, biography, drama and essay—as to which of them is nearest grace. It is not the form that seizes the truth, but the imagination of the artist work-

ing through the form. Imagination and the sense of life are as necessary to a good historian as to a good novelist. Artists need not quarrel for precedence for any particular art in a world in which all the great books that have so far been written could be packed into a little room. At the same time, it is well that a novelist should take his art as seriously as Aristotle took the art of poetry. It often requires an exaggeration to bring the truth into prominence. And, in any case, the exaggerations of the novelists in this respect have as a rule been modest compared to the exaggerations of the poets.

If Mr. Conrad is to be believed, however, the novelist is the rival, not only of the historian, but of the moralist. He warmly denies that he is a didactic writer, but at least he holds that in all great fiction a moral is implicit that he who runs may read:

> That a sacrifice must be made, that something has to be given up, is the truth engraved in the innermost recesses of the fair temple built for our edification by the masters of fiction. There is no other secret behind the curtain. All adventure, all love, every success is resumed in the supreme energy of an act of renunciation.

One would have to think hard in order to fit *Tristram Shandy* and *The Pickwick Papers* into

this—if the word is not forbidden—formula. Perhaps it is a formula more applicable to tragic than to comic writing. Mr. Conrad as critic often seems to be defining his own art rather than the art of fiction in general. He knows what he himself is aiming at in literature, and he looks for the same fine purpose in his fellow-writers. We feel this when he requires of the novelist "many acts of faith of which the first would be the cherishing of an undying hope." This, he declares, "is the God-sent form of trust in the magic force and inspiration belonging to the life of this earth." "To be hopeful in an artistic sense," he adds, "it is not necessary to think that the world is good. It is enough to believe that there is no impossibility of its being made so." There surely speaks the author of *Youth* and *Typhoon.* And the image of the same author may be seen in the remark that "I would ask that in his dealings with mankind he"—the novelist—"should be capable of giving a tender recognition to their obscure virtues." Mr. Conrad cannot escape from the shadow of his own genius. It falls on every page of his criticism as fatally as any formula, though more vividly. His protest against what has been called "stylism" is simply the protest of one who did not approach the art of literature through that door.

He is praising not merely Maupassant but his ideal self when he tells us:

> His proceeding was not to group expressive words, that mean nothing, around misty and mysterious shapes dear to muddled intellects and belonging neither to earth nor to heaven. His vision by a more scrupulous, prolonged and devoted attention to the aspects of the visible world, discovered at last the right words as if miraculously impressed for him upon the face of things and events.

That, no doubt, is how Mr. Conrad learned the art of writing, and we may read autobiography into his praise of Maupassant again when he says: "He stoops to no littleness in his art—least of all to the miserable vanity of a catchy phrase." But his appreciation of Maupassant, though admirable in so far as it defines certain qualities in his own and Maupassant's work, is worded in a manner that savours of intolerance of the work of many other good writers, from Shakespeare to Dickens and, if one may include a more Lilliputian artist, Stevenson. Thus he observes:

> He will not be led into perdition by the seductions of sentiment, of eloquence, of humour, pathos; of all that splendid pageant of faults that pass between the writer and his probity on the blank sheet of paper, like the glittering cortège of deadly sins before the austere anchorite in the desert air of the Thebaïde.

Maupassant's austerity may have been an excellent thing for Maupassant, but to write like this is surely to reduce austerity to the level of a formula. That "splendid pageant of faults" may well be the salvation of another writer. We may admit that they remain faults unless they fit in as organic parts of a writer's work. But Maupassant was a smaller, not a greater, writer in so far as he was unable so to fit them in.

It would be going too far to suggest, however, that Mr. Conrad merely emphasises in other writers those qualities which he himself either possesses or desires to possess. Most good portraits are double portraits: they portray both the painter and the sitter. Mr. Conrad always does justice to his sitter, as when he writes: "Henry James is the historian of fine consciences," or as when he says of Maupassant: "It cannot be denied that he thinks very little. In him extreme energy of perception achieves great results, as in men of action the energy of force and desire." At the same time, we read *Notes on Life and Letters* for the light it throws, not on this or that author or the Polish question or the question of unsinkable ships, but on Mr. Conrad himself. The essay on Anatole France, for instance, interests us mainly because it reminds us that Mr. Conrad is as impatient of political panaceas as

of literary formulas. Remembering that Anatole France is a Socialist, he observes characteristically: "He will disregard the stupidity of the dogma and the unlovely form of the ideal. His art will find its own beauty in the imaginative presentation of wrongs, of errors, and miseries that call aloud for redress." He commands the artist to hope, but he clearly forbids anybody to hope too much. His "Note on the Polish Problem" shows that during the war the most he hoped for his country was an Anglo-French protectorate. Humanitarians horrify him with their dreams. He hates impossibilism as he hates the talk about unsinkable ships. But what he really hates most, both in politics and in ships, is the blind worship of machinery. He looks on Socialism, I fancy, as an attempt on the part of machine-worshippers to build an unsinkable State—a monstrous political *Titanic,* defiant of the facts of nature and fore-doomed to catastrophe. And how this old master of a sailing-ship hates the *Titanic!* He has little that is good to say, indeed, of any steam vessels, at least of cargo steam vessels—"a suggestion of a low parody directed at noble predecessors by an improved generation of dull mechanical toilers, conceited and without grace." Progress? He retorts: "The tinning of salmon was 'progress.' "

And yet, when he met the men of the merchant service during the war, he had to admit that "men don't change." That is a fact at once reassuring and depressing. It is reassuring to know that human beings, if they avoid the sin of idolaters, can make use of machines with reasonable safety. The machine, like the literary formula, is a convenience. Even the Socialist State would be only a convenience. It would in all probability be very little more alarming than a button-hook or a lead pencil.

IV

MR. WELLS AND THE WORLD

Mr. Wells is in love with the human race. It is one of the rarest of passions. It is a passion of which not even all imaginative men are capable. It was, perhaps, the grandest of Shelley's grand passions, and it was the demon in William Morris's breast. On the other hand, it played a small part if any, in the lives of Shakespeare and Dickens. Their kaleidoscopic sympathy with human beings was at the antipodes from Shelley's angelic infatuation with the human race. The distinction has often been commented on. It is the difference between affection and prophecy. There is no reason, I suppose, why the two things should not be combined, and, indeed, there have been affectionate prophets both among the religious teachers and among men of letters. But, as a rule, one element flourishes at the expense of the other, and Charles Lamb would have been as incapable of even wishing to write the *Out-*

line of History as Mr. Wells would be of attempting to write the *Essays of Elia.*

Not that Mr. Wells gives us the impression that he loves men in general more than Charles Lamb did. It seems almost as if he loved the destiny of man more than he loves man himself. His hero is an anonymous two-legged creature who was born thousands of years ago and has been reincarnated innumerable times and who will go on being re-born until he has established the foundations of order amid the original slime of things. That is the character in history whom Mr. Wells most sincerely loves. He means more to him than Moses or any of Plutarch's men. Plutarch's men, indeed, are for the most part men who might have served man but preferred to take advantage of him. Compare Plutarch's and Mr. Wells's treatment of Cato the Elder and Julius Cæsar, and you will see the difference between sympathy with individual men and passion for the purpose of man. You will see the same difference if you compare the Bible we possess with the new Bible of which Mr. Wells draws up a syllabus in *The Salvaging of Civilisation.* The older book at the outset hardly pauses to deal with man as a generalisation, but launches almost at once into the story of one man called Adam and one

woman called Eve. Mr. Wells, on the other hand, would begin the human part of his narrative with "the story of our race":

> How through hundreds of thousands of years it won power over nature, hunted and presently sowed and reaped. How it learnt the secrets of metals, mastered the riddle of the seasons, and took to the seas. That story of our common inheritance and of our slow upward struggle has to be taught throughout our entire community in the city slums and in the out-of-the-way farmsteads most of all. By teaching it, we restore again to our people the lost basis of a community, a common idea of their place in space and time.

Mr. Wells's attitude to men, it is clear, is primarily that of a philosopher, while the attitude of the Bible is primarily that of a poet. It remains to be seen whether a philosopher's Bible can move the common imagination as the older Bible has moved it. That it can move and excite it in some degree we know. We have only to read the glowing pages with which *The Salvaging of Civilisation* opens in order to realise this. Mr. Wells's passion for the human group is infectious. He expresses it with the vehemence of a great preacher. He plays, like many great preachers, not on our sympathy so much as on our hopes and fears. His book is a book of salvation and damnation—of warnings to flee

from the wrath to come, of prophecies of swords turned into ploughshares and spears into pruning-hooks. He loves his ideal group-man almost as Bunyan loved Christian. He offers him, it is true, at the end of his journey, not Paradise, but the World-State. He offers it to him, moreover, not as an individual but as a type. He bids men be ready to perish in order that man may arrive at the goal. His book is a call to personal sacrifice to the end, not of personal, but of general salvation. That, however, is an appeal that has again and again been proved effective in history. It is of the same kind as the appeal of patriotism in time of war. "Who dies if England lives?" sang Mr. Kipling. "Who dies if the World-State lives?" Mr. Wells retorts.

The question remains whether the ordinary man can ever be brought to think of the world as a thing worth living and dying for as he has often thought his country worth living and dying for. If the world were attacked by the inhabitants of another planet, world-patriotism would become a necessity of self-defence, and the peoples of the world would be presented with the alternatives of uniting or perishing. Mr. Wells believes, no doubt, that they are presented with these alternatives already. But can they be made to realise this by anything but an external

enemy? It is external enemies that create and intensify patriotism. Can human beings as a whole organise themselves against war as the enemy with the same thoroughness with which Englishmen organised themselves against Germany as the enemy? Mr. Wells obviously believes that they can. But it is to the great religions, not to the great patriotisms, that he looks for examples of how this can be done. He recalls how the Christian religion spread in the first four centuries and how the Moslem religion spread in the seventh century, and he believes that these precedents "support a reasonable hope that such a change in the minds of men, whatever else it may be, is a practicable change." His gospel of human brotherhood, indeed, is propounded as a larger Christianity rather than as a larger patriotism. He realises, however, the immensity of the difficulties in the way of the spread of this gospel. He sees that the majority of men are still indifferent to it. Unless they are in the vein for it, "it does not really interest them; rather it worries them." That is why he believes so ardently in the need of a new Bible—a Bible of Civilisation—which will restore to modern men "a sense of personal significance, a sense of destiny, such as no one in politics or literature seems to possess to-day."

That is why he scorns such a compromise and concession to the frailty of human nature as a League of Nations and calls on men to turn their eyes from all such conveniences and makeshifts and to concentrate on the more arduous ideal of human unity. Of the League of Nations he writes:

> The praise has a thin and legal and litigious flavour. What loyalty and what devotion can we expect this multiple association to command? It has no unity—no personality. It is like asking a man to love the average member of a woman's club instead of loving his wife.
>
> For the idea of man, for human unity, for our common blood, for the one order of the world, I can imagine men living and dying, but not for a miscellaneous assembly that will not mix—even in its name. It has no central idea, no heart to it, this League of Nations formula.

Many people will agree with much of Mr. Wells's scornful criticism of the League of Nations. He is obviously writing the plainest common sense when he declares that it has failed so far to solve the problem of modifying the traditional idea of sovereign independence and the problem of a super-national force that will be stronger than any national force. The average statesman is still an Imperialist at heart, even when he praises the League of Nations with his

lips. He desires a world-order that will confirm the present order of rival Empires rather than a world-order that will supersede it. He desires to avert war, but only if he may preserve all the conditions that make war inevitable. Mr. Wells is impatient of all this as a treachery to the greatest ideal that has come into the world in our time. On the other hand, I think that the advocates of the League of Nations and not the advocates of the World State are going the right way to propagate the sense of world-unity that Mr. Wells desires. The League of Nations, whatever its shortcomings, does make human nature a partner in its ideal. It remembers the ordinary human being's affection for his own country, and does not treat it as a mere prejudice in the path. It realises that the true victory of internationalism will be not as the destroyer of individualism but as its counterweight. It used to be thought that a man could not be loyal to both his church and his country unless the Church were a State Church. Some Socialists have believed that the family and the State were inevitable rivals. As a matter of fact, every man is in a state of balance among conflicting loyalties—loyalty to himself, to the family, to the school, to the Church, to the State, to the world. The religion of the brotherhood

of man must bow to this fact, or it must fail. To ignore it is to be a doctrinaire—to fail, that is, to bring home one's doctrine to men's business and bosoms. It is to sit above the battle so far as the immediate issues with which mankind is faced are concerned. Mr. Wells has rendered an immense service to his time by compelling us to remember the common origin and the common interests of mankind. He has invented a wonderful telescope through which we can look back and see man struggling out of the mud and can look forward and see him climbing a dim and distant pinnacle. I am not sure, however, if he has pointed out the most desirable route to the pinnacle—whether he does not expect us to reach it as the crow flies instead of by winding roads and by bridges across the deep rivers and ravines. He may take the view that, as man has learned to fly mechanically, so he may learn to fly politically. One never knows. The glorious feature of his prophetic writing, meanwhile, is its driving-force. He is one of the few writers who have given momentum to the idea of the world as one place.

V

MR. CLUTTON-BROCK

Mr. Clutton-Brock is a critic with an unusual equality of interests. He seems to be the centre of an almost perfect circle, and literature, painting, religion, philosophy, ethics, and education are the all but equal radii that connect him with the circumference. Many writers have been as versatile, but few have been as symmetrical. He has all his gifts in due proportion. He is not more æsthetic than moral, or more moral than æsthetic. His idealism and his intellect balance each other exactly. His matter and his manner are twins. He produces on us the effect of a harmony, not of a nature in conflict with itself. Had he lived in the ancient world, he would probably have been a teacher of philosophy. He has gifts of temper as well as powers of exposition and understanding that make him a teacher even to-day, whether he will or not. He does not speak down to us from the chair,

but he is at our elbows murmuring with exquisite restraint yet with an eagerness only half-hidden the "nothing too much" of the Greeks, the "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty" of Keats, the good news that the flesh and spirit are not enemies but friends, and that the Earth for the wise man is not at odds with Paradise.

Those who shrink from virtue as from a split infinitive sometimes speak in disparagement of Mr. Clutton-Brock's gifts. He is the head of a table at which the virtues and the graces sit down side by side, and they are dressed so much alike that it is not always easy to tell which is which. He is always seeking, indeed, the point at which a virtue passes into a grace, and he knits his brows over those extreme differences that separate one from the other. The standard by which he measures things in literature and in life is an ideal world in which goodness and beauty answer one another in antiphonal music. His ideal man is the *kalos k' agathos* of ancient Athens. He goes among authors in quest of this part-song in their work. He misses it in the later Tolstoy: he discovers it in Marvell and Vaughan. He is not to be put off, however, with a forced and unnatural antiphony. He is critical of the antiphony of body and soul that announces "All's well!" in Whitman's verse. He

finds in Whitman not organic cheerfulness but functional cheerfulness—"willed cheerfulness," he calls it. And he says of Whitman with penetrating wisdom: "He was a man not strong enough in art or in life to do without that willed cheerfulness; it is for him a defence like irony, though a newer, more democratic, more American defence." He writes with equal wisdom when he says that Whitman "has got a great part of his popularity from those who were grateful to him for saying so firmly and so often what they wished to believe." But might not this be said of all poets of hope? Might it not be said of Shelley and of Browning? I am not sure, indeed, that Mr. Clutton-Brock does not do serious injustice to Whitman in exaggerating the element of reaction in him against old fears as well as old forms. His discovery of the secret of what is false in Whitman has partly blinded him to the secret of what is true. Otherwise, how could he ask us whether there is anything in *Leaves of Grass* that moves us as we are moved by Edgar Allan Poe's *The Sleeper?* Can he have forgotten *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,* to name but one of Whitman's profoundly moving poems? Mr. Clutton-Brock does, indeed, end his essay with fine if tempered praise of Whitman's genius. But his essay as a whole is

a question-mark, expressing a doubt of something false, something even "faked."

His essay on Poe is more sympathetic. He finds in Poe, not a false harmony, but a real discord—a pitiable discord. "There was a fatal separation," we are told, "between his intellect and his emotions, except in a very few of his poems, because he could not value life or human nature in comparison with the life and the nature of that other planet for which he was homesick. So he exercised his intellect on games, but with a thwarted passion which gives a surprising interest and beauty even to his detective stories." This is well said, but, as we read the essay, we become aware of a curious ultra-fastidiousness in Mr. Clutton-Brock—a lack of vulgarity, in the best sense of the word. We see this in his attitude to Poe's most popular work; he dismisses *The Raven* and *The Bells* as "fit to be recited at penny readings." That certainly has been their fate, but it does not prevent them from being masterpieces in their kind—the *jeux d'esprit* of a planet-struck man. They are not, however, we may admit, the poems that reveal Poe as an inspired writer. It is a much more serious thing for Mr. Clutton-Brock to omit *Annabel Lee* from the list of the six poems or so, on which Poe's reputation as a poet rests. *An-*

nabel Lee is a work of genius, if Poe ever wrote a work of genius. *Helen, Thy Beauty is to Me* —which has none of its faults—is the only one of his poems that challenges its supremacy, perhaps successfully. Mr. Clutton-Brock's essay on the other hand, will be of service to the general reader if it gives him the feeling that Poe is to be approached, not as a hackneyed author, but as a writer of undiscovered genius. He does not exaggerate the beauty of *The Sleeper,* though he exaggerates its place in Poe's work. The truth is, Poe is a neglected poet. The average reader regards him as too well known to be worth reading, and *The Sleeper, The City in the Sea* and *Romance* are ignored because *The Bells* has fallen into the hands of popular reciters.

Mr. Clutton-Brock has the happy gift of taking his readers into the presence of most of his authors in the spirit of discoverers. It is not that he aims at originality or paradox. He is always primarily in search of truth, even when he gets on a false scent. His essay on Meredith is a series of interesting guesses at truth, some of which are extremely suggestive, and some of which seem to me to miss the mark. The most suggestive is the remark that *Love in the Valley* is not only written on "a theme that inspired the music of the first folk-songs," but that the verse

itself has "for its underlying tune" a folk-measure—the old Saturnian measure of the Romans. Macaulay, it may be remembered, was startled to learn that his ballad of "brave Horatius" was written largely in the Saturnian metre, and still more startled when he was unable to find any perfect example of this metre in English verse, except:

The Queen was in her parlour, eating bread and honey.

It comes as something of a shock to be told that the lines—

> Lovely are the curves of the white owl sweeping
> Wavy in the dusk lit by one large star;

are musically akin to:

> Lars Porsena of Clusium,
> By the nine gods he swore.

And Mr. Clutton-Brock would be the last man to pretend that it is the same music we find in both. Meredith's variations on the old tune are, he makes clear, as important a part of the music as is the old tune itself. "It is folk-song with the modern orchestra like the symphonies of Dvorák, and it combines a singing rhythm with sharpness and fullness of detail as they had never before been combined in romantic poetry."

Criticism like this is not merely a comment on technique; it is a guess of the spirit, emphasising the primitive and universal elements which make *Love in the Valley* probably the most enduring of Meredith's works.

I do not think Mr. Clutton-Brock is so happy when he writes of Meredith as a novelist. He goes too far when he suggests that Meredith's witty characters, or mouthpieces, are "always subsidiary and often unpleasant," like the wise youth in *Richard Feverel.* Meredith, he declares, "does not think much of these witty characters that he cannot do without." He "would never make a hero more witty than he could help, for he likes his heroes to be either men of action or delightful youths whom too much cleverness would spoil. He himself was not in love with cleverness, and never aimed at it." This is only partly true. It is partly true in regard to Meredith's men, and not true at all in regard to his women. *Diana of the Crossways* alone is enough to disprove it. Meredith's heroes were conventions; his heroines were creations; and he liked his creations to be witty. He loved wit as his natural air. His *Essay on Comedy* is a witty dithyramb in praise of wit. Mr. Clutton-Brock seems to me to make another mistake in regard to Meredith when he says that "if he had had

less genius, less power of speech, less understanding of men, he might have been an essayist." As a matter of fact, Merdith was too proud to be an essayist. There are no proud esssayists, though many vain ones. Mr. Belloc is the nearest thing to a proud essayist that one can think of, and his pride is really only a fascinating arrogance.

It will be seen that Mr. Clutton-Brock excites to controversy, as every good critic who attempts a new analysis of an author's genius must do. Were there space, I should like to dispute many points in his essay, "The Defects of English Prose," in which, incidentally, he accepts the current over-estimate of the prose—the excellent prose—of Mr. Hudson. The purpose of criticism, however, is to raise questions as much as to answer them, and this Mr. Clutton-Brock continually does in his thoughtful analysis of the success and failure of great writers. He is an expositor with high standards in life and literature, who worships beauty in the temple of reason. His essays, though slight in form, are rich in matter. They are fragments of a philosophy as well as comments on authors.

VI

HENLEY THE VAINGLORIOUS

Henley was a master of the vainglorious phrase. He was Pistol with a style. He wrote in order to be overheard. His words were sturdy vagabonds, bawling and swaggering. "Let us be drunk," he cried in one of his *rondeaux,* and he made his words exultant as with wine.

He saw everywhere in Nature the images of the lewd population of midnight streets. For him even the moon over the sea was like some old hag out of a Villon ballade:

> Flaunting, tawdry and grim,
> From cloud to cloud along her beat,
> Leering her battered and inveterate leer,
> She signals where he prowls in the dark alone,
> Her horrible old man,
> Mumbling old oaths and warming
> His villainous old bones with villainous talk.

Similarly, the cat breaking in upon the exquisite dawn that wakes the "little twitter-and-

cheep" of the birds in a London Park becomes a picturesque and obscene figure:

Behold
A rakehell cat—how furtive and acold!
A spent witch homing from some infamous dance—
Obscene, quick-trotting, see her tip and fade
Through shadowy railings into a pit of shade!

Or, again, take the description of the East Wind in *London Voluntaries:*

Out of the poisonous East,
Over a continent of blight,
Like a maleficent influence released
From the most squalid cellarage of hell,
The Wind-fiend, the abominable—
The Hangman Wind that tortures temper and light—
Comes slouching, sullen and obscene,
Hard on the skirts of the embittered night;
And in a cloud unclean
Of excremental humours, roused to strife
By the operation of some ruinous change,
Wherever his evil mandate run and range,
Into a dire intensity of life,
A craftsman at his bench, he settles down
To the grim job of throttling London Town.

This is, of its kind, remarkable writing. It may not reflect a poetic view of life, but it reflects a romantic and humorous view. Henley's humour is seldom good humour: it is, rather, a

sort of boisterous invective. His phrases delight us like the oaths of some old sea-captain if we put ourselves in the mood of delight. And how extravagantly he flings them down, like a pocketful of money on the counter of a bar! He may only be a pauper, behaving like a rich man, but we, who are his guests for an hour, submit to the illusion and become happy echoes of his wild talk.

For he has the gift of language. It is not the loud-sounding sea but loud-sounding words that are his passion. Compared to Henley, even Tennyson was modest in his use of large Latin negatives. His eloquence is sonorous with the music of "immemorial," "intolerable," "immitigable," "inexorable," "unimaginable," and the kindred train of words. He is equally in love with "wonderful," "magnificent," "miraculous," "immortal," and all the flock of adjectival enthusiasm.

> Here in this radiant and immortal street,

he cries, as he stands on a spring day in Piccadilly. He did not use sounding adjectives without meaning, however. His adjectives express effectively that lust of life that distinguishes him from other writers. For it is lust of life, in contradistinction to love, that is the note of

Henley's work. He himself lets us into this secret in the poem that begins:

> Love, which is lust, is the Lamp in the Tomb.

Again, when he writes of Piccadilly in spring, he cries:

> Look how the liberal and transfiguring air
> Washes this inn of memorable meetings,
> This centre of ravishments and gracious greetings,
> Till, through its jocund loveliness of length
> A tidal-race of lust from shore to shore,
> A brimming reach of beauty met with strength,
> It shines and sounds like some miraculous dream,
> Some vision multitudinous and agleam,
> Of happiness as it shall be evermore!

The spectacle of life produced in Henley an almost exclusively physical excitement. He did not wish to see things transfigured by the light that never was on sea or land. He preferred the light on the wheels of a hansom cab or, at best, the light that falls on the Thames as it flows through London. His attitude to life, in other words, was sensual. He could escape out of circumstances into the sensual enchantments of the *Arabian Nights,* but there was no escape for him, as there is for the great poets, into the general universe of the imagination. This physi-

cal obsession may be put down in a measure to his long years of ill-health and struggle. But even a healthy and prosperous Henley, I fancy, would have been restless, dissatisfied, embittered. For him most seas were Dead Seas, and most shores were desolate. The sensualist's "Dust and Ashes!" breaks in, not always mournfully, but at times angrily, upon the high noon of his raptures. He longs for death as few poets have longed:

> Of art and drink I have had my fill,

he declares, and the conclusion of the whole matter is:

> For the end I know is the best of all.

To his mother, to his sister, to Stevenson he writes this recurrent message—the glad tidings of death to come. Man's life is for him but a child's wanderings among the shows of a fair:

> Till at last,
> Tired of experience he turns
> To the friendly and comforting breast
> Of the old nurse, Death.

And in most of his poems on this theme it seems to be the peace of the grave he desires, not an immortality of new experiences. There is one

moving poem, however, dedicating the "windle-straws" of his verse to his wife in which a reference to their dead child suggests that he, too, may have felt the hunger for immortality:

Poor windlestraws
On the great, sullen, roaring pool of Time
And Chance and Change, I know!
But they are yours, as I am, till we attain
That end for which we make, we two that are one:
A little exquisite Ghost
Between us, smiling with the serenest eyes
Seen in this world, and calling, calling still
In that clear voice whose infinite subtleties
Of sweetness, thrilling back across the grave,
Break the poor heart to hear:

"Come, Dadsie, come?
Mama, how long—how long?"

Sufferer and sensualist, Henley found in the affections some relief from his savage unrest. It was affection that painted that masterly sonnet-portrait of Stevenson in *Apparition,* and there is affection, too, in that song in praise of England, *Pro Rege Nostro,* though much of his praise of England, like his praise of life, is but poetry of lust. Lust in action, unfortunately, has a way of being absurd, and Henley is often absurd in his lustful—by which one does not mean lascivious—poems. His *Song of the Sword* and his

Song of Speed are both a little absurd in their sheer lustfulness. Here we have a mere extravagance of physical exultation, with a great deal of talk about "the Lord," who is—to the ruin of the verse—a figure of rhetoric and phrase of excitement, and not at all the Holy Spirit of the religious.

Henley, indeed, was for the most part not a religious man but an egoist. He saw his own shadow everywhere on the universe, like the shadow of a crippled but undefeated lion. He saw himself sometimes with pity, oftener with pride. One day he found his image in an "old, black rotter of a boat" that lay stranded at Shoreham:

> With a horrid list, a frightening lapse from the line,
> That makes me think of legs and a broken spine.

But he preferred to think, as in the most famous of his poems, of his "unconquerable soul," and to enjoy the raree-show of life heroically under the promise of death. To call this attitude vainglorious is not to belittle it. Henley was a master in his own school of literature, and his works live after him. His commixture of rude and civil phrase may be a dangerous model for other writers, but with what skill he achieves the right emphasis and witty magniloquence of

effect! He did not guess (or guess at) the secrets of life, but he watched the pageant with a greedy eye, sketched one or two figures that amused or attracted him, and cheered till his pen ought to have been hoarse. He also cursed, and, part of the time, he played with rhymes, as if in an interchange of railleries. But, in all circumstances, he was a valiant figure—valiant not only in words but in the service of words. We need not count him among the sages, but literature has also room for the sightseers, and Henley will have a place among them for many years to come.

VII

LORD ROSEBERY

Lord Rosebery's oratory is the port at a banquet. It is a little somnolent in its charm. Mr. Birrell has a better cellar of the livelier French wines. But the Rosebery port is a wine without which no memorial dinner can come to a perfect end. It is essentially the wine of memory. It is used to moisten monumental effigies as champagne is used to christen ships. As you read his two volumes of *Miscellanies,* you get the impression that, wherever there is an effigy to be unveiled, you will find Lord Rosebery present with his noble aspersion of words. I do not know whether Lord Rosebery himself chooses what effigies he will talk about or whether he has them chosen for him. It is difficult to imagine a statue on which he would not talk admirably. He is the greatest living showman of statues. Even when there is no statue to be unveiled, but only a centenary to be commemorated, he usually sees the great man in the posture of a statue—a little

larger than life, and with the sins and scandals discreetly slurred over. Hence it would be in vain to look in his commemoration addresses for great character studies or critical interpretations of genius. They are compliments, not criticisms. They are spoken on behalf of all present. Lord Rosebery's art is the art of the funeral speech blended with the art of the speech at a distribution of prizes. Of this difficult though minor art he is an accomplished practitioner.

Hence it would be ridiculous to judge his addresses on Burns by the same standards by which we judge the studies of Carlyle and Stevenson and Henley on the same subject. Lord Rosebery's speeches belong to the literature of formalities, and it is their chief virtue that they express the common view with brightness of emphasis, humour of anecdote, and at times with a charming sentimental music of speech. They say what everyone present would regard as the right thing to say, and they say it very much better than anybody else on the platform could say it. He is a spokesman, not a discoverer. His freshness is that of a man who furnishes what is already known rather than of one who adds to the stock of knowledge. That he has also the gifts of the writer who can add to the stock of knowledge is shown by his humorous, fascinating and

amiable portrait of Lord Randolph Churchill. Here he speaks for himself, not for the meeting. Lord Randolph is as real to him as a character in fiction, with his spell, his impudence and his disaster. As we read this story we feel that, if he cared, Lord Rosebery might write a book of reminiscences, telling with detached frankness the whole truth about himself and his great associates, which would have an immortal place in English biographical literature. For the present, however, we must be content that there should be someone who can speak the general mind on Burns and Burke, on Oliver Cromwell and Dr. Johnson, with a hint of majesty and a lulling charm.

Certainly, he reveals no secrets that are not open secrets about his heroes. He is continually asking "What is his secret?" and the answer is usually a little disappointing, a little exiguous in surprise, when it comes. Thus he tells us that the secret of Burns "lies in two words—inspiration and sympathy." That is true, but it leaves Burns smooth as a statue. Burns appeals to us surely, not only through his inspiration and sympathy, but as the spirit of man fluttering rebelliously, songfully, satirically, against the bars of orthodoxy. Scotsmen revere him as the champion of human nature against the Levites.

His errors, no doubt, were as gross as those of the Levites, but human nature turns affectionately to those who protest on its behalf against tyranny, and Burns with all his sins, was a liberator. When he comes to Burke, Lord Rosebery again asks, "What is his secret?" "The secret of Burke's character," he says, "is this, in my judgment—that he loved reform and hated revolution." This, again, leaves Burke with the eyes of a statue. We shall understand the secret of Burke much better if we see him as a man who had far more passionate convictions about the duties than about the rights of human beings. He believed in good government and in good citizenship, but he was never even touched by the Utopian dream of the perfectibility of man. Lord Rosebery, indeed, brings the figures of the dead to life, not in his interpretation of their secrets, but usually in some anecdote that reminds us of their profound humanity.

His happiest speeches, as a result, are about great men whose private lives have already been laid bare to all the world. When he has to speak on Thackeray, whose life still remains half a secret, he devotes more space to literary criticism, and Thackeray remains for the most part an effigy hung with wreaths of compliments. It is the fashion nowadays to speak ill of Thackeray,

and Lord Rosebery's extravagances on the other side would tempt even a moderate man into disparagement. He refers to Thackeray as "the giant whom we discuss to-day." There could not be a more inappropriate word for Thackeray than "giant." One might almost as well call Jane Austen a "giantess." Charlotte Brontë, as a young author coming under Thackeray's spell, might legitimately feel that she was in the presence of a Titan. But a man may be a Titan to his contemporaries and yet be no Titan in the long line of great authors. Thackeray, I am convinced, is greatly underestimated to-day, but he will come back into his own only if we are prepared to welcome him on a level considerably below that of the Titans—below Dickens and Tolstoy, below even Sterne. Not that Lord Rosebery finds nothing to censure in Thackeray. Though he remarks that *Vanity Fair* "appears to many of us the most full and various novel in the English language," he has no praise for "the limp Amelia and the shadowy Dobbin." At the same time, he turns aside his censures with a compliment. "The blemishes of *Vanity Fair* exalt the book," he declares; "for what must be the merits of a work which absolutely eclipse such defects?" It is one of the perils of oratory that it leads men to utter sentences of this kind. They

mean little or nothing, but they have the ring of amiability. On the other hand, Lord Rosebery makes no concession to amiability in his criticism of *Esmond*. "The plot to me," he says, "is simply repulsive. The transformation of Lady Castlewood from a mother to a wife is unnatural and distasteful to the highest degree. Thackeray himself declared that he could not help it. This, I think, only means that he saw no other than this desperate means of extricating the story. I cannot help it, too. One likes what one likes, and one dislikes what one dislikes." An occasional reservation of this kind helps to give flavour to Lord Rosebery's compliments. It gives them the air of being the utterances, not of a professional panegyrist, but of a detached and impartial mind. Thus he begins his eulogy of Dr. Johnson with a confession that Johnson's own writings are dead for him apart from "two poems and some pleasing biographies." "Speaking as an individual and illiterate Briton"—so he makes his confession. It is as though the tide withdrew in order to come in with all the more surprising volume.

One thing that must strike many readers with astonishment while reading these speeches and studies is that an orator so famous for his delicate wit should reveal so little delight in the wit of

authors. His enthusiasm is largely moral enthusiasm. We think of Lord Rosebery as a *dilettante,* and yet the *dilettanti* of literature and public life make only a feeble appeal to him. He is interested in few but men of strong character and men of action. His heroes are such men as Cromwell and Mr. Gladstone. Is it that he is an ethical *dilettante,* or is it that he is seeking in these vehement natures a strength of which he feels the lack in himself? Certainly, as we read him, he casts the shadow of a man who has almost all the elements of greatness except this strength. He has been Prime Minister, he has won the Derby, he has achievements behind him sufficient (one would imagine) to fill three lives with success, and yet somehow we picture him as a brilliant failure as we picture the young man who had great possessions. These very *Miscellanies* bear the stamp of failure. They are the praises of famous men spoken from a balcony in the Castle of Indolence. They are graceful and delightful. But they are haunted by a curious pathos, for the eyes of the speaker gaze wistfully from where he stands towards the path that leads to the Hill Difficulty and the pilgrims who advance along it under heavy burdens to their perils and rewards.

VIII

MR. VACHEL LINDSAY

Mr. Lindsay objects to being called a "jazz poet"; and, if the name implied that he did nothing in verse but make a loud, facetious, and hysterical noise, his objection would be reasonable. It is possible to call him a "jazz poet," however, for the purpose not of belittling him, but of defining one of his leading qualities. He is essentially the poet of a worked-up audience. He relies on the company for the success of his effects, like a Negro evangelist. The poet, as a rule, is a solitary in his inspiration. He is more likely to address a star than a crowded room. Mr. Lindsay is too sociable to write like that. He invites his readers to a party, and the world for him is a round game. To read "The Skylark" or the "Ode to a Nightingale" in the hunt-the-slipper mood in which one enjoys "The Daniel Jazz" would be disastrous. Shelley and Keats

give us the ecstasy of a communion, not the excitement of a party. The noise of the world, the glare, and the jostling crowds fade as we read. The audience of Shelley or Keats is as still as the audience in a cathedral. Mr. Lindsay, on the other hand, calls for a chorus, like a singer at a smoking-concert. That is the spirit in which he has written his best work. He is part entertainer and part evangelist, but in either capacity he seems to demand not an appreciative hush, but an appreciative noise.

It is clear that he is unusually susceptible to crowd excitement. His two best poems, "Bryan, Bryan" and "The Congo," are born of it. "Bryan, Bryan" is an amazing attempt to recapture and communicate a boy's emotions as he mingled in the scrimmage of the Presidential election of 1896. Mr. Lindsay becomes all but inarticulate as he recalls the thrill and tumult of the marching West when Bryan called on it to advance against the Plutocrats. He seems to be shouting like a student when students hire a bus and go forth in masks and fancy dress to make a noise in the streets. Luckily, he makes an original noise. He knows that his excitement is more than he can express in intelligible speech, and so he wisely and humorously calls in the aid of nonsense, which he uses with such skill and

vehemence that everybody is forced to turn round and stare at him:

Oh, the long-horns from Texas,
The jay hawks from Kansas,
The plop-eyed bungaroo and giant giassicus,
The varmint, chipmunk, bugaboo,
The horned toad, prairie-dog, and ballyhoo,
From all the new-born states arow,
Bidding the eagles of the West fly on,
Bidding the eagles of the West fly on.
The fawn, prodactyl, and thing-a-ma-jig,
The rakeboor, the hellangone,
The whangdoodle, batfowl and pig,
The coyote, wild-cat, and grizzly in a glow,
In a miracle of health and speed, the whole breed abreast,
They leaped the Mississippi, blue border of the West.
From the Gulf to Canada, two thousand miles long—
Against the towns of Tubal Cain,
Ah—sharp was their song.
Against the ways of Tubal Cain, too cunning for the young,
The long-horn calf, the buffalo, and wampus gave tongue.

In such a passage as this Mr. Lindsay pours decorative nonsense out of a horn of plenty. But his aim is not to talk nonsense: it is to use nonsense as the language of reality. As paragraph follows paragraph, we see with what sureness he is piling colour on colour and crash on crash in order that we may respond almost physically to the sensations of those magnificent and tumultu-

ous days. He has discovered a new sort of rhetoric which enables him to hurry us through mood after mood of comic, pugnacious and sentimental excitement. Addressed to a religious meeting, rhetoric of this kind would be interrupted by cries of "Glory, Hallelujah!" and "Praise de Lord!" Unless you are rhetoric-proof, you cannot escape its spell. Isolated from its context, the passage I have quoted may be subjected to cold criticism. It is only when it keeps its place in the living body of the poem and becomes part of the general attack on our nerves that it is irresistibly effective.

In "The Congo," it is the excitement of Negroes—in their dances and their religion—that Mr. Lindsay has set to words. As he watches their revels, the picture suggests a companion-picture of Negroes orgiastic in Africa, in the true Kingdom of Mumbo-Jumbo—a Negro's fairy-tale of a magic land:

> Just then from the doorway, as fat as shotes,
> Came the cake-walk princes in their long red coats,
> Canes with a brilliant lacquer shine,
> And tall silk hats that were red as wine.
> And they pranced with their butterfly partners there,
> Coal-black maidens with pearls in their hair,
> Knee-skirts trimmed with the jessamine sweet,
> And bells on their ankles and little black feet.

But it is the grotesque comedy of the American Negro, not the fantasia on Africa, that makes "The Congo" so entertaining a poem. The description of the "fat black bucks in a wine-barrel room" has often been quoted. There is the same feeling of "racket" in the picture of a religious camp meeting:

A good old negro in the slums of the town
Preached at a sister for her velvet gown;
Howled at a brother for his low-down ways,
His prowling, guzzling, sneak-thief days;
Beat on the Bible till he wore it out
Starting the jubilee revival shout.
And some had visions as they stood on chairs,
And sang of Jacob, and the golden stairs.
And they all repented, a thousand strong,
From their stupor and savagery and sin and wrong,
And slammed on their hymn books till they shook the room
With "glory, glory, glory,"
And "Boom, boom, *Boom.*"

Whatever qualities Mr. Lindsay lacks, he has humour, colour and gusto. When he writes in the tradition of the serious poets, as in "Abraham Lincoln Walks at Midnight" and "Epilogue," he is negligible: he is only one of a thousand capable verse-writers. He is dependent on his own idiom to a greater extent even than was Robert Burns. Not that his work in rag-time English is com-

parable in other respects to Burns's in Scots. Burns's themes were, apart from his comic verse, the traditional themes of the poets—the aristocrats of the spirit. Mr. Lindsay is a humorist and sentimentalist who is essentially a democrat of the spirit—one of the crowd.

And, just as he is the humorist of the crowd, so is he the humorist of things immense and exaggerated. His imagination is the playground of whales and elephants and sea-serpents. He is happy amid the clangour and confusion of a railway-junction. He rejoices in the exuberant and titanic life of California, where:

> Thunder-clouds of grapes grow on the mountains.

and he boasts that:

> There are ten gold suns in California,
> When all other lands have one,
> For the Golden Gate must have due light
> And persimmons be well done.
> And the hot whales slosh and cool in the wash
> And the fume of the hollow sea,
> Rally and roam in the loblolly foam
> And whoop that their souls are free.

Mr. Lindsay himself can whoop like a whale. He is a poet in search of superlatives beyond the superlatives. He cannot find them, but he at

least articulates new sounds. As one reads him, one is reminded at times of a child in a railway-train singing and shouting against the noise of the engine and the wheels. The world affects Mr. Lindsay as the railway-train affects some children. He is intoxicated by the rhythm of the machinery. As a result, though he is often an ethical poet, he is seldom a spiritual poet. That helps to explain why his verse does not achieve any but a sentimental effect in his andante movements. As his voice falls, his inspiration falls. In "The Santa Fé Trail" he breaks in on the frenzy of a thousand motors with the still, small voice of the bird called the Rachel Jane. He undoubtedly moves us by the way in which he does this; but he moves us much as a sentimental singer at a ballad concert can do. It is not for passages of this kind that one reads him. His words at their best do not minister at the altar: they dance to the music of the syncopated orchestra. That is Mr. Lindsay's peculiar gift. It would hardly be using too strong a word to say that it is his genius.

IX

MR. PUNCH TAKES THE WRONG TURNING

There are those who gibe at *Punch*. There are also those who gibe at those who gibe at *Punch*. The match is a fairly even one. *Punch* is undoubtedly not as good as it used to be, but it is not quite so certain that it is not as clever as it used to be. Very few people realise that *Punch* was once a good paper—that it was a good paper, I mean in the Charles-Kingsley sense of the adjective. It began in 1841, as Mr. C. L. Graves prettily says, by "being violently and vituperatively on the side of the angels." If *Punch* had kept pace with the times it would, in these days, at the age of eighty, be suspected of Socialism. Its championship of the poor against those who prospered on the poverty of the poor was as vehement as a Labour speech at a street-corner. One of the features of the early *Punch* was a "Pauper's Corner," in which "the cry of the people found frequent and touching utterance."

Mr. Punch Takes the Wrong Turning

It was in the Christmas number of *Punch* in 1843 that Hood's "Song of the Shirt" was first published. Mark Lemon, the editor, insisted on publishing it, though all his colleagues were opposed to him on the point. In the following years we find the same indignant sense of realities expressing itself in Leech's cartoon, "The Home of the Rick Burner," which emphasised the fact that the cause of an outburst of incendiarism in Suffolk was the greed of the farmers who underpaid their labourers. *Punch* also took up the cause of the sweated labourers in verse:

I'll sing you a fine old song, improved by a modern pate,
Of a fine Old English Gentleman, who owns a large estate,
But pays the labourers on it a very shabby rate.
Some seven shillings each a week for early work and late,
Gives this fine Old English Gentleman, one of the present time.

Nor did *Punch* shrink from looking a good deal higher than the fine Old English Gentleman for his victims. He had a special, almost a Lloyd Georgian, taste for baiting dukes. He attacked the Duke of Norfolk with admirable irony for suggesting to the poor that they should eke out their miserable fare by using curry powder. He made butts in turn of the Duke of Marlborough,

the Duke of Buckingham, the Duke of Sutherland, the Duke of Richmond and the Duke of Atholl. He did not spare even the Duke of Wellington. "The old Duke," he declared, "should no longer block up the great thoroughfare of civilisation—he should be quietly and respectfully eliminated." It was in the same mood that the Marquis of Londonderry was denounced both as a tyrannical coal-owner and an enemy of the Queen's English—"the most noble, but not the most grammatical Marquis." *Punch's* view of the House of Lords is expressed with considerable directness in his scheme for reforming the Chamber, which begins:

> It is an indisputable truth that there can be no such thing as a born legislator. As unquestionable is the fact that there may be a born ass.
>
> But your born ass may be born to your legislator's office, and command a seat in the house of legislators by inheritance, as in not a few examples, wherein the coronet hides not the donkey's ears.

This is not particularly brilliant. It is interesting not so much in itself as because it is the sort of thing with which *Punch* used regularly to regale its readers. *Punch* in those days was a paper with a purpose. Its humour, like Dickens's was to a certain extent a missionary humour. *Punch* saw himself as the rescuer of the

underdog, and, if he could not achieve his object comically, he was prepared to do it angrily. He did not hesitate to fling his cap and bells rudely in the face of royalty itself. He might be accused of vulgarity, but not of being, as he has since become, the more or less complacent advocate of Toby, the top-dog.

Mr. Graves seems to think that the change in the spirit of *Punch* is due to the mellowness that comes with increasing years. But the real reason, I fancy, is that, while *Punch* began under an editor whose sympathies were with the bottom-dog, the sympathies of later editors have been much more respectable. It is not that *Punch* has lost the fire of youth, but that it has lost the generosity of the Victorian man of letters. It was, it may be admitted, easier to be generous in those days. A Victorian could make himself the champion of the ill-used poor without any feeling that he was assisting in bringing about a new order in society. A middle-class Georgian who attaches himself to the same cause cannot do so without realising that it is not a question of patching an old suit of clothes, but of making a new and a better one. The Victorian committed himself to charity. The Georgian has to commit himself to the cold-blooded charity of equality. *Punch,* indeed, seems to have begun to take alarm

as soon as the Chartist movement made it appear likely that the workers were going to demand, not sympathetic treatment, but something like self-determination. By 1873, according to Mr. Graves, "references to the champagne-habit among the miners abound." In a cartoon, "From the Coal Districts," we are shown a lady in a fruiterer's saying, "I'm afraid I must give up the pineapple, Mr. Green! Eight shillings is really too much!" She is interrupted by a "successful collier" who bids the fruiterer, "Just put 'em up for *me,* then, Master. 'Ere's 'arf a sovereign; and look 'ere—yer may keep the change if yer'll *only tell us 'ow to cook 'un.*" *Punch,* as we know it to-day, had been born.

It is interesting to trace the change in the temper of *Punch,* not only in domestic, but in foreign, affairs. *Punch* appears to have given up his pacifism—or, as Mr. Graves calls it with reforming zeal, his "pacificism"—as a result of his generous sympathy with insurgent Italians and Hungarians. That was the thin end of the wedge. Having once drawn the sword, *Punch* found it even more enjoyable than drawing cartoons. He drew it fiercely against the Russians in the Crimean War. He drew it fiercely against the Indians in the Indian Mutiny. He drew it on behalf of General Eyre after the

negro outbreak in Jamaica. He drew it against Lincoln in the American Civil War. Mr. Graves ought, for historical reasons, to have reprinted *Punch's* parody on one of Lincoln's speeches. He is content, however, to describe it as "a truly lamentable performance, in which the President claims dictatorial powers, calls for whipcord to whip the rebels, abuses the 'rotten old world,' talks with the utmost cynicism of the blacks, and in general behaves like a vulgar buffoon." Mr. Graves, with an impartiality which cannot be too highly praised, reminds the *Punch* of those days that "the magnanimous Lincoln would never allow" the Southerners to be called rebels in his presence—a significant reminder when we recall how Mr. Lloyd George drew on the Lincoln parallel in defending his treatment of the Irish. But, for the ironist, the most amusing of all *Punch's* blunders in regard to foreign policy is the welcome he offered to the birth of the German Navy in an article called "Bravo, Bismarck!" "Britannia through her *Punch,*" he wrote, "rejoices to weave among her naval azures a new shade—Prussian blue." It is only fair to say that *Punch* was not consistent in his attitude to Germany. But he has shown a curious capacity for backing the wrong horse—the horse that seemed to "get away" at the start, but that

was ultimately disqualified by the stern judge, history. He gave up championing lost causes and took to championing causes that would be lost a generation later.

In the result, Mr. Graves, though a wit of distinction, has produced in *Mr. Punch's History of Modern England* a book that is pathetic rather than amusing. It is a cemetery of dead jokes—the offspring of a little gentleman with a long nose who was cross more often than he was funny. *Punch,* indeed, has been for the most part a grinner rather than a wit. It has had, and still has, brilliant writers on its staff. But its temper is not the temper of its most brilliant contributors. Its attitude is that of the prosperous clubman who dislikes the advance both of the new rich and of the old poor. It has undoubtedly made itself the most successful comic paper in the world, but one sometimes wonders whether it has done so as a result of allying itself with comedy or of allying itself with success. Yet the fact remains that other men have started rivals to *Punch,* and that they have not only been not so successful as *Punch* but not so comic. *Punch* always baits the hook of its odious politics with a reasonable amount of comedy about things in general, and in the comedy of things in general, even if we think it might be done still better, it has at least always

been ahead of its rivals. There have been men who have dreamed of a *Punch* that would bring the spirit of comedy to bear on all sides impartially. There are others who have dreamed of bringing the spirit of comedy to bear on the right side. One would not, perhaps, mind what side *Punch* was on if only it were a little more generous—if only it purveyed the human comedy as a comedy, and not, as in the case of working men, Irishmen, and non-Allied foreigners, as a sinister crook melodrama.

X

MR. H. M. TOMLINSON

Mr. Tomlinson is a born traveller. There are two sorts of travellers—those who do what they are told and those who do what they please. Mr. Tomlinson has never moved about the world in obedience to a guide-book. He would find it almost as difficult to read a guide-book as to write one. He never echoes other men's curiosity. He travels for the purpose neither of information nor conversation. He has no motive but whim. His imagination goes roaming; and, his imagination and his temper being such as they are, he is out on his travels even if he gets no farther than Limehouse or the Devonshire coast. He has, indeed, wandered a good deal farther than Limehouse and Devonshire, as readers of *The Sea and the Jungle* know. Even in his more English volumes of sketches, essays, confessions, short stories—how is one to describe them?—he takes us with

him to the north coast of Africa, to New York, and to France in war time. But the English sketches—the description of the crowd at a pit-mouth after an explosion in a coal mine, the account of a derelict railway station and a grocer's boy in spectacles—almost equally give us the feeling that we are reading the narrative of one who has seen nothing except with the fortunate eyes of a stranger. It is all a matter of eyes. To see is to discover, and all Mr. Tomlinson's books are, in this sense, books of discoveries.

As a recorder of the things he has seen he has the three great gifts of imagery, style and humour. He sees the jelly-fish hanging in the transparent deeps "like sunken moons." A boat sailing on a windy day goes skimming over the inflowing ridges of the waves "with exhilarating undulations, light as a sandpiper." A queer Lascar on a creeping errand in an East-end street "looked as uncertain as a candle-flame in a draught." How well again Mr. Tomlinson conveys to us in a sentence or two the vision of Northern Africa on a wet day:

> As for Bougie, these African villages are built but for sunlight. They change to miserable and filthy ruins in the rain, their white walls blotched and scabrous, and their paths mud tracks between the styes. Their lissome and statuesque inhabitants become

> softened and bent, and pad dejectedly through the muck as though they were ashamed to live, but had to go on with it. The palms which look so well in sunny pictures are besoms up-ended in a drizzle.

Mr. Tomlinson has in that last sentence captured the ultimate secret of a wet day in an African village. Even those of us who have never seen Africa save on the map, know that often there is nothing more to be said. Mr. Tomlinson, however, is something of a specialist in bad weather, as, perhaps, any man who loves the sea as he does must be. The weather fills the world for the seaman with gods and demons. The weather is at once the day's adventure and the day's pageant. Mr. Conrad has written one of the greatest stories in the world simply about the weather and the soul of man. He may be said to be the first novelist writing in English to have kept his weather-eye open. Mr. Tomlinson shares Mr. Conrad's sensitive care for these things. His description of a storm of rain bursting on the African hills makes you see the things as you read. In its setting, even an unadorned and simple sentence like——

> As Yeo luffed, the squall fell on us bodily with a great weight of wind and white rain, pressing us into the sea,

compels our presence among blowing winds and dangerous waters.

But, weather-beaten as Mr. Tomlinson's pages are, there is more in them than the weather. There is an essayish quality in his books, personal, confessional, go-as-you-please. The majority of essays have egotism without personality. Mr. Tomlinson's sketches have personality without egotism. He is economical of discussion of his own tastes. When he does discuss them you know that here is no make-believe of confession. Take, for instance, the comment on place-names with which he prefaces his account of his disappointment with Tripoli:

> You probably know there are place-names, which, when whispered privately, have the unreasonable power of translating the spirit east of the sun and west of the moon. They cannot be seen in print without a thrill. The names in the atlas which do that for me are a motley lot, and you, who see no magic in them, but have your own lunacy in another phase, would laugh at mine. Celebes, Acapulco, Para, Port Royal, Cartagena, the Marquesas, Panama, the Mackenzie River, Tripoli of Barbary—they are some of mine. Rome should be there, I know, and Athens, and Byzantium. But they are not, and that is all I can say about it.

That is the farthest Mr. Tomlinson ever gets on the way towards arrogance. He ignores Rome

and Athens. They are not among the ports of call of his imagination. He prefers the world that sailors tell about to the world that scholars talk about. He will not write about—he will scarcely even interest himself in—any world but that which he has known in the intimacy of his imaginative or physical experience. Places that he has seen and thought of, ships, children, stars, books, animals, soldiers, workers—of all these things he will tell you with a tender realism, lucid and human because they are part of his life. But the tradition that is not his own he throws aside as a burden. He will carry no pack save of the things that have touched his heart and his imagination.

I wish all his sketches had been as long as "The African Coast." It is so good that it makes one want to send him travelling from star to star of all those names that mean more to him than Byzantium. One desires even to keep him a prisoner for a longer period among the lights of New York. He should have written about the blazing city at length, as he has written about the ferries. His description of the lighted ferries and the woman passenger who had forgotten Jimmy's boots, remains in the memory. Always in his sketches we find some such significant "thing seen." On the voyage home from New York on a

floating hotel it is the passing of a derelict sailing ship, "mastless and awash," that suddenly recreates for him the reality of the ocean. After describing the assaults of the seas on the doomed hulk, he goes on:

> There was something ironic in the indifference of her defenceless body to these unending attacks. It mocked this white and raging post-morten brutality, and gave her a dignity that was cold and superior to all the eternal powers could now do. She pitched helplessly head first into a hollow, and a door flew open under the break of her poop; it surprised and shocked us, for the dead might have signed to us then. She went astern of us fast, and a great comber ran at her, as if it had just spied her, and thought she was escaping. There was a high white flash, and a concussion we heard. She had gone. But she appeared again far away, forlorn on a summit in desolation, black against the sunset. The stump of her bowsprit, the accusatory finger of the dead, pointed at the sky.

We find in "The Ruins" (which is a sketch of a town in France just evacuated by the Germans) an equally imaginative use made of a key incident. First, we have the description of the ruined town itself:

> House-fronts had collapsed in rubble across the road. There is a smell of opened vaults. All the homes are blind. Their eyes have been put out. Many of

> the buildings are without roofs, and their walls have come down to raw serrations. Slates and tiles have avalanched into the street, or the roof itself is entire, but has dropped sideways over the ruin below as a drunken cap over the dissolute.

And so on till we come to the discovery of a corn-chandler's ledger lying in the mud of the roadway. Only an artist could have made a tradesman's ledger a symbol of hope and resurrection on a shattered planet as Mr. Tomlinson has done. He picks out from the disordered procession of things treasures that most of us would pass with hardly a glance. His clues to the meaning of the world are all of his own finding. It is this that gives his work the savour and freshness of literature.

As for clues to Mr. Tomlinson's own mind and temper, do we not discover plenty of them in his confessions about books? He is a man who likes to read *The Voyage to the Houyhnhnms* in bed. Heine and Samuel Butler and Anatole France are among his favourite authors. There is nothing in his work to suggest that he has taken any of them for his models. But there is a vein of rebellious irony in his writing that enables one to realise why his imagination finds in Swift good company. He, too, has felt his heart lacerated, especially in these late days of the

world's corruption. His writing would be bitter, one feels, were it not for the strength of his affections. Humanity and irony contend in his work, and humanity is fortunately the winner. In the result, the world in his books is not permanently a mud-ball, but a star shining in space. Perhaps it is in gratitude for this that we find it possible at last even to forgive him his contemptuous references to Coleridge's *Table-talk* —that cache of jewels buried in metaphysical cotton-wool.

XI

THE ALLEGED HOPELESSNESS OF TCHEHOV

A Russian critic has said that Tchehov had nothing to give his fellows but a philosophy of hopelessness. He committed the crime of destroying men's faith in God, morals, progress, and art. This is an accusation that takes one's breath away. If ever there was a writer who had a genius for consolation—a genius for stretching out a hand to his floundering fellow-mortals—it was Tchehov. He was as active in service as a professional philanthropist. His faith in the decency of men was as inextinguishable as his doubt. His tenderness was a passion. He was open-hearted to all comers. He never shut his door either on a poor man needing medicine, or on a young man needing praise. He was equally generous as author, doctor and reformer. He who has been represented as a disbeliever in anything was no disbeliever even in contemporary men of genius. His attitude to

Tolstoy was not one of idolatry, but it came as near being idolatrous as is possible for a clever man. "I am afraid of Tolstoy's death," he wrote in 1900. "If he were to die there would be a big, empty place in my life. . . . I have never loved any man as much as him. I am not a believing man, but of beliefs I consider his the nearest and most akin to me." In his gloomier moods he thought little enough of the work either of himself or his younger contemporaries. "We are stale," he wrote; "we can only beget gutta-percha boys." But this was because he was on his knees before everything that is greatest in literature. In a letter to his friend, Suvorin, editor of the *Novoe Vremya,* he wrote:

> The writers, who we say are for all time or are simply good, and who intoxicate us, have one common and very important characteristic—they are going towards something and summoning you towards it, too, and you feel, not with your mind but with your whole being, that they have some object, just like the ghost of Hamlet's father, who did not come and disturb the imagination for nothing. Some have more immediate objects—the abolition of serfdom, the liberation of their country, politics, beauty, or simply vodka, like Denis Davgdov; others have remote objects—God, life beyond the grave, the happiness of humanity, and so on. The best of them are idealists, and paint life as it is, but, through every life's being soaked in the

consciousness of an object, you feel, besides life as it is, the life which ought to be, and that captivates you.

If this is the confession of an unbeliever, a philosopher of hopelessness, we may reasonably ask for a new definition of belief.

Tchehov, indeed, was born with an impulse towards reverence and faith. Though he denied that he was either a Liberal or a Conservative, he excited himself about causes like a schoolboy revolutionary. He had a religious sense of justice. He was ardently on Zola's side during the Dreyfus excitement. "Let Dreyfus be guilty," he declared, "and Zola is still right, since it is the duty of writers not to accuse, not to persecute, but to champion even the guilty once they have been condemned and are enduring imprisonment. . . . There are plenty of accusers, persecutors, and gendarmes without them, and in any case the rôle of Paul suits them better than that of Saul." He quarrelled with Suvorin for attacking Zola. "To abuse Zola when he is on his trial—that is unworthy of literature."

We find the same ardent reforming spirit running through the whole of Tchehov's life. At one time he is engrossed in a project for building in Moscow a "People's Palace," with a library, reading-rooms, a lecture-room, a museum, and a

theatre. At another time, he is off to the island of Saghalin to study with his own eyes the horrors of the Siberian penal system. "My God," he writes in the course of his investigations, "how rich Russia is in good people! If it were not for the cold which deprives Siberia of the summer, and if it were not for the officials who corrupt the peasants, Siberia would be the richest and happiest of lands." In another letter he looks forward to building a school "in the village where I am a school-warden." When a plague of cholera breaks out, we find Tchehov once more living for others with the same saintly unselfishness. At times, no doubt, he cursed the cholera and he cursed his patients like a human being; but his cries were the cries of an exhausted body; they were merely a proof of the zeal that had worn him out. There is an attractive portrait of Tchehov at this time in the biographical sketch that precedes the English translation of his letters:

> He returned home shattered and exhausted, but always behaved as though he were doing something trivial; he cracked little jokes and made everyone laugh as before, and carried on conversations with his dachshund Quinine, about her supposed sufferings.

This may be consistent with the philosophy of despair. It is certainly very unlike the practice

of despair. But that Tchehov's creed was the opposite of a creed of despair may be seen in letter after letter. In one letter he writes:

> I believe in individual people. I see salvation in individual personalities scattered here and there all over Russia—educated people or peasants—they have strength though they are few.

In another letter he says:

> Modern culture is only the first beginning of work for a great future, work which will perhaps go on for tens of thousands of years, in order that man may, if only in the remote future, come to know the truth of the real God—that is not, I conjecture, by seeking in Dostoievsky, but by clear knowledge, as one knows twice two are four.

If one thing is obvious, it is that the writer of these sentences is an enthusiast. Take him, again, when he is protesting against "trade-marks and labels" for artists, and announcing his creed:

> My holy of holies is the human body, health, intelligence, talent, inspiration, love, and the most absolute freedom—freedom from violence and lying, whatever forms they may take. This is the programme I would follow if I were a great artist.

In regard to literature, he believed not in the disheartening sort of realism but in a temperate idealism, as we learn from an excellent parable:

> Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham only noticed that his father was a drunkard, and completely lost sight of the fact that he was a genius, that he had built an ark and saved the world. Writers must not imitate Ham. . . .

On the other hand, Tchehov was always alert to defend the practice of honest realism in literature. He refused to admit that it is the object of literature to "unearth the pearl from the refuse-heap":

> A writer is not a confectioner, not a provider of cosmetics, not an entertainer; he is a man bound, under contract, by his sense of duty and his conscience; having put his hand to the plough, he mustn't turn back, and however distasteful, he must conquer his squeamishness and soil his imagination with the dirt of life. He is just like any ordinary reporter. What would you say if a newspaper correspondent, out of a feeling of fastidiousness or from a wish to please his readers, would describe only honest mayors, high-minded ladies, and virtuous railway contractors?

In Tchehov's view, it is the duty of the artist to tell the truth about his characters, not to draw morals from them. "The artist," he declares, "must not be the judge of his characters and of their conversations, but merely an impartial witness." The artist must, no doubt, strive after some such impartiality as this. But the great

artist will never quite attain to it. Shakespeare, Dickens, and Tchehov himself, all lavished affection on some of their characters and withheld it from others.

On the other hand, the artist must be tolerant to a degree that frequently shocks the orthodox moralist. He approaches individual men, not as a censor, but as a recorder. Tchehov, writing to a friend from his country estate, relates, for instance: "The village priest often comes and pays me long visits; he is a very good fellow, a widower, and has some illegitimate children." To the stern moralist, a priest who is a very good fellow with some illegitimate children is an unthinkable paradox. To the artist it is a paradox that exists in nature: he accepts it with a smile. It is not that Tchehov was indifferent to the vices of the flesh. We find him writing on one occasion to a great journalist: "Why do they write nothing about prostitution in your paper? It is the most fearful evil, you know. Our Sobelev street is a regular slave-market."

Tchehov, indeed, like every great artist, was a man divided. He had the artist's passion for describing his fellow-men: he had also the doctor's passion for helping them. He was in a sense pulled in opposite directions by these rival passions. Luckily, the tug-of-war, instead of

weakening, positively strengthened his genius. The great artist is a reformer transformed. Shakespeare is sometimes held to have lived aloof from the reformer's temporary passions. But that repeated summons to reconciliation in his plays is the *credo* of a man who has plumbed the great secret of the liberalism of his time and, equally, of ours. Pity, tenderness, love, or whatever you choose to call it, is an essential ingredient of the greatest genius, whether in reform or in art. It is the absence of pity that is the final condemnation of most of the literature, painting, and sculpture of our time. When pity is exhausted, the best part of genius is exhausted, and there is little but cleverness left. In Tchehov, more than in almost any other author of recent years, truth and tenderness are united. He tells us the truth even when it is most cruel, but he himself is kind. He often writes like a doctor going his rounds in a sick world. But he cares for the sick world. That is why his stories delight us as the synthetic golden syrup of more optimistic authors never does.

XII

NIETZSCHE: A NOTE

"*And thus I wander alone like a rhinoceros.*" Nietzsche writes in one of his letters that he had discovered this "strong closing sentence" in an English translation of the sacred books of the Buddhists and had made it a "household word." It is at once a grotesque and an apt image of his isolation in a world of men and women. His solitude made him perilous: it ultimately exalted his egoism into madness. There are few more amazing passages in the annals of literature than those containing the last letters between the mad Nietzsche and the mad Strindberg. Nietzsche, signing himself "Nietzsche Cæsar," wrote on New Year's Eve, 1888:

> I have appointed a meeting day of monarchs in Europe. I shall order . . . to be shot.
>
> Au revoir! For we shall surely see each other again. On one condition only. Let us divorce.

Strindberg, writing on the same date and signing himself "The best, the highest God," began his letter to Nietzsche: "I will, I will be raving mad," and concluded it:

> Meanwhile, let us rejoice in our madness. Fare you well and be true to your
>
> STRINDBERG
> (The best, the highest God).

Nietzsche's reply was:

> Mr. STRINDBERG:
> Alas! . . . no more! Let us divorce!
>
> "THE CRUCIFIED."

Dr. Oscar Levy, in his introduction to an English selection from Nietzsche's letters, vigorously objects to the emphasis that has been laid by some critics on Nietzsche's madness. It is a reasonable protest, if the accusation is put forward in order to damage Nietzsche's fame as an artist among philosophers. Dr. Levy, however, goes so far on the other side that he almost leaves us with a picture of Nietzsche as a perfectly normal man with all the normal "slave virtues." "A good friend, a devoted son, an affectionate brother, and a generous enemy"—"not the slightest trace of any lack of judgment"—"perfectly healthy and lucid"—such are

the phrases in which the Nietzsche of these letters is portrayed. We are told that "even the curious last letter to Georg Brandes still gives a perfect sense." Here is the letter:

To the Friend Georg.

Having been discovered by you no trick was necessary for the others to find me. The difficulty is now to get rid of me.

"The Crucified."

It would, I agree, be ridiculous to dwell on the madness at the close of Nietzsche's life, if such extravagant claims had not been made for him by his followers. But the madness of Nietzsche is relevant enough in a criticism of his philosophy, if we are asked to accept him as one of the inspired guides to life.

Nietzsche himself was at once terrified and intoxicated by his sense of his own abnormal difference from common men. He knew, in part of his nature, that this aloofness was an evil. He craved for sympathy so passionately at times that he cried to one of his friends: "The whole of my philosophy totters after one hour's sympathetic intercourse even with total strangers!" About the same time—it was in 1880—he wrote:

One ceases from loving oneself properly when one *ceases* from exercising oneself in love towards others,

wherefore the latter (the ceasing from exercising, etc.) ought to be strongly deprecated. (This is from my own experience.)

Even before that, however he had definitely decided on the egocentric life. Writing to a friend on the subject of marriage, he declared: "I shall certainly not marry; on the whole, I hate the limitations and obligations of the whole civilised order of things so very much that it would be difficult to find a woman free-spirited enough to follow my lead." He was himself the measure by which he measured all the values of life. "I am not quite satisfied with Nature," he had said in an early letter, "who ought to have given me a little more intellect as well as a warmer heart." But this mood of modesty did not last. At that time, he saw in his egoism his greatest weakness. "One begins to feel constantly as if one were covered with a hundred scars and every movement were painful." As his consciousness of his genius grew, every scar and every pain seemed to him to bear witness, not to his egoism, but to his greatness. He assures his sister in 1883 that he is grateful even for his physical suffering because through it "I was torn away from an estimate of my life-task which was not only false but a hundred times too *low*." He declares that he naturally belonged to

"the modest among men," so that "some violent means were necessary in order to recall me to myself." He was unquestionably heroic in the way in which he accepted all the miseries of his life as the natural lot of a saviour of mankind. He boasted of his isolation and his sufferings magnificently. No sooner, however, did the world begin to smile on him than he began to boast on a more normal plane of delighted vanity. His most attractive braggings were addressed to his mother. He wrote to her from Turin:

> Oh, if you only knew on what terms the foremost personages of the world express their loyalty to me—the most charming women, a *Madame la Princesse Tenicheff* not by any means excepted. I have genuine geniuses among my admirers—to-day there is no name that is treated with as much distinction and respect as my own. You see that is the feat—sans name, sans rank, and sans riches, I am nevertheless treated like a little prince here, by everybody, even down to my fruit-stall woman, who is never satisfied till she has picked me out the sweetest bunch from among her grapes.

Grateful though he was for the practical admiration of the fruit-stall woman, however he liked to pick and choose among his admirers. After he had received an enthusiastic greeting from a coterie of Viennese disciples, he wrote scornfully

to his mother of "such adolescent advances." "I do not," he declared, "write for men who are fermenting and immature." He sneered if he was praised; he was infuriated if he was ignored. At one moment he would sneer at the barbarous Germans who did not understand him. At another, he would show how deeply he felt this want of appreciation in his own country for his "unrelenting subterranean war against all that mankind has hitherto honoured and loved." Shortly before he went mad, he wrote to a friend:

> Although I am in my forty-fifth year and have published about fifteen books (—among them that *non plus ultra* "Zarathustra"), no one in Germany has yet succeeded in producing even a moderately good review of a single one of my works. They are now getting out of the difficulty with such words as "eccentric," "pathological," "psychiatric." There have been evil and slanderous hints enough about me, and in the papers both scholarly and unscholarly, the prevailing attitude is one of ungoverned animosity—but how is it that no one protests against this? How is it that no one feels insulted when I am abused? And all these years no comfort, no drop of human sympathy, not a breath of love.

He reproached even his sister for her want of understanding. "You do not seem to be even

remotely conscious," he told her, "of the fact that you are next of kin to the man and his destiny, in which the question of millenniums has been decided—speaking quite literally, I hold the Future of mankind in my hand." It is because his correspondence is so full of passages in this and similar moods that we find in Nietzsche's letters little of the intimacy that we expect in good letters. It is as though he were suffering from an obsession about his fame. Many of his letters are merely manifestoes about himself. He was not greatly interested in other people or in the little ordinary things that interest other people. His most enjoyable passages might be described as outbursts, and towards the end of his life he chose as his correspondents Strindberg and Brandes, who also had the genius of outburst but in a less superb degree. It was Brandes who wrote to him with regard to Dostoievsky:

> He is a true and great poet, but a vile creature, absolutely Christian in his way of thinking and living, and at the same time quite *sadique*. His morals are wholly what you have christened "Slave Morality."

"Just what I think," replied Nietzsche.

Not that the letters are without an occasional touch of fun. There is a delightful early letter in which Nietzsche tells how, being invited to meet

Wagner, he ordered a dress suit. It was brought round to the house just in time to allow him to dress. The old messenger, however, brought not only the parcel but the bill, and presented it to Nietzsche:

> I took it politely, but he declared he must be paid on delivery. I was surprised, and explained that I had nothing to do with him as the servant of my tailor, but that my dealings were with his master to whom I had given the order. The man grew more pressing, as did also the time. I snatched at the things and began to put them on. He snatched them too and did all he could to prevent me from dressing. What with violence on my part and violence on his, there was soon a scene, and all the time I was fighting in my shirt, as I wished to get the new trousers.
>
> At last, after a display of dignity, solemn threats, the utterance of curses on my tailor and his accomplice, and vows of vengeance, the little man vanished with my clothes.

There is another amusing letter to his sister, in which he tells her how, one Christmas Day at Nice, he drank too much:

> Then your famous animal drank three quite large glasses of a sweet local wine, and was just the slightest bit top-heavy; at least, not long afterwards, when the breakers drew near to me, I said to them as one says to a bevy of farmyard fowls, "Shsh! Shsh! Shshh!"

This incident is comically symbolic of much of Nietzsche's philosophy.

It is hardly necessary to go into Dr. Levy's defence of Nietzsche against the charge that he was the "man who caused the war." Dr. Levy points out quite justly that Nietzsche was as severe a critic of Prussians and Prussianism as any English leader-writer in war-time. This, however, does not meet the point of the anti-Nietzscheans. What they contend is that Prussianism is essentially the vulgar application of the principles that underlie the Nietzschean philosophy. It is obviously ridiculous to contend that Nietzsche caused the war. It is arguable, however, that he was the supreme poet of the supreme falsehood that is at the bottom of all unjust wars.

In any case, like Carlyle, he will probably survive as an artist rather than as a teacher. And even men who detest his gospel will delight in the lightning of his phrase as it shoots out of the thunder-clouds of his imagination.

XIII

MR. T. S. ELIOT AS CRITIC

Mr. Eliot, in his critical essays, is an undertaker rather than a critic. He comes to bury Hamlet not to praise him. He has an essay on "Hamlet and His Problems," in which he assures us that, "so far from being Shakespeare's masterpiece, the play is most certainly an artistic failure." Now, there are several things about *Hamlet* that call for explanation. But there is one thing that needs no explanation, and that is its "artistic failure." One might as well set out to explain why the mid-Atlantic is shallow, why Mont Blanc is lower than Parliament Hill, why Cleopatra was unattractive, why roses have an offensive smell. It might be possible for a writer of paradoxes to amuse himself and us on any of these themes. But Mr. Eliot is no dealer in paradoxes. He is a serious censor of literature, who lives in the gloom of a basement, and cannot believe in the golden pomp of the sun outside. It might be

unfair to say that what he is suffering from is literary atheism. He has undoubtedly gods of his own. But he worships them in the dark spirit of the sectarian, and his interest in them is theological rather than religious in kind. He is like the traditional Plymouth Brother whose belief in God is hardly so strong as his belief that there are "only a few of us"—perhaps "only one of us"—saved. We see the Plymouth-Brother mood in his reference to "the few people who talk intelligently about Stendhal and Flaubert and James." This expresses an attitude which is intolerable in a critic of literature, and should be left to the *précieuses ridicules.*

Mr. Eliot, however, does not merely say that *Hamlet* is an artistic failure and leave it at that. He goes on to explain what he means. He believes that:

> Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* so far as it is Shakespeare's, is a play dealing with the effect of a mother's guilt upon her son, and that Shakespeare was unable to impose this motive successfully upon the "intractable" material of the old play.

In so far as this is an attempt to explain the specifically new Shakespearian emphasis in *Hamlet,* in contrast to those elements which he borrowed from an earlier play, the first part of

the assertion is worth considering. But, as regards the completed play that we possess, novelties, borrowings, and all, the entire sentence gives us merely a false simplification. Shakespeare's finished *Hamlet* is a play dealing with many things besides the effect of a mother's guilt on her son. It is a play dealing with the effect of a whole circle of ruinous events closing in on a man of princely nature, who was a foreigner amid the baseness that surrounded him. Shakespeare showed in *Hamlet* that it was possible, contrary to all the rules, to write a play which combined the largeness of a biography with essential dramatic unity. Mr. Eliot, however, clings to the idea that Shakespeare failed in *Hamlet* because he was divided in interest between the theme of the guilty mother and other intractable stuff "that the writer could not drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate into art." Now, every great work of art is like the visible part of an iceberg; it reveals less than it leaves hidden. The greatest poem in the world is no more than a page from that inspired volume that exists in the secret places of the poet's soul. There is no need to explain the mysteries that crowd about us as we read *Hamlet* by a theory of Shakespeare's failure. To summon these mysteries into the narrow compass of a play is the surest evidence

of a poet's triumph. Let us see, however, how Mr. Eliot, holding to his guilty-mother theme, attempts to explain the quality of Shakespeare's failure. He writes:

> The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. If you examine any of Shakespeare's more successful tragedies, you will find this exact equivalence; you will find that the state of mind of Lady Macbeth walking in her sleep has been communicated to you by a skilful accumulation of imagined sensory impressions; the words of Macbeth on hearing of his wife's death strike us as if, given the sequence of events, these words were automatically released by the last event in the series. The artistic "inevitability" lies in this complete adequacy of the external to the emotion; and this is precisely what is deficient in *Hamlet.*

"Hamlet (the man)," he adds, "is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in *excess* of the facts as they appear." Mr. Eliot has a curious view of the things that justify violent emotion. I should have thought that the murder of a father by his usurping brother, the infidelity of a mother and a mistress, the use of former companions to spy on him, the failure of

all that had once seemed honest and fair, plots to murder him, the suicide of his beloved, might have caused considerable perturbation even in the soul of a fish. If ever there was a play in which the emotion is not in excess of the facts as they appear, that play is *Hamlet.* The emotion is "in excess" only in the sense that it expresses for us not merely the personal emotion of one man, but the emotions of generation after generation of fine and sensitive spirits caught in the gross toils of disaster. Hamlet is a universal type as well as an individual. In this he resembles such a figure as Prometheus to a degree which canot be claimed for Lear or Macbeth or Othello. That, perhaps, is the real mystery that has bewildered Mr. Eliot.

Mr. Eliot will have it, however, that Shakespeare, and not he himself, is to blame for his bewilderment. He concludes his essay:

> We must simply admit that here Shakespeare tackled a problem which proved too much for him. Why he attempted it at all is an insoluble puzzle; under compulsion of what experience he attempted to express the inexpressibly horrible, we cannot ever know. We need a great many facts in his biography; and we should like to know whether, and when, and after or at the same time as what personal experience, he read Montaigne, II. xii, "Apologie de Raimond Sebond." We should have, finally, to know something

> which is by hypothesis unknowable, for we assume it to be an experience which, in the manner indicated, exceeded the facts. We should have to understand things which Shakespeare did not understand himself.

Would it be possible to write a paragraph in which there was a greater air of intellectual pursuit and a tinier reality of intellectual achievement? It would not be easy to say more essentially irrelevant things on a great subject. Mr. Eliot is like a man dissecting—and dissecting with desperate earnestness—a corpse that isn't there.

And his essays in praise have scarcely more of that vitality which is a prerequisite of good criticism than his essays in blame. He obviously admires Blake and Ben Jonson, but he leaves them as rigid and as cold as though he were measuring them for their coffins. The good critic communicates his delight in genius. His memorable sentences are the mirrors of memorable works of art. Like the poet, he is something of a philosopher, but his philosophy is for the most part implicit. He is a light-bringer by means of quotation and aphorism. He may destroy, but only in order to let in the light. His business among authors is as glorious as was the business of Plutarch among men of action. He may be primarily æsthetic, or primarily biographical, or

primarily expository; but in no kind of criticism can he reach more than pedantry, unless he himself is a man of imagination, stirred by the spectacle of the strange and noble passions of the human soul. He knows that literature is not the game of a coterie, but is a fruit of the tree of life, hanging from the same boughs as the achievements of lovers and statesmen and heroes. There is so little truth in Mr. Eliot's statement that "a literary critic should have no emotions except those immediately provoked by a work of art—and these . . . are, when valid, perhaps not to be called emotional at all," that one would be bound to tell ten times more truth merely by contradicting it. The ideal critic would always be able to disentangle relevant from irrelevant emotions as he studied a work of art; but in practice all critics, save a few makers of abstract laws, are human, and the rich personal experience of the critic enters into his work for good as well as evil.

Mr. Eliot fails as a critic because he brings us neither light nor delight. But this does not mean that he will always fail. He has some of the qualities that go to the making of a critic. He has learning, and he enjoys intellectual exercise. His essay on "Tradition and the Individual Talent" shows that he is capable of ideas, though he is not yet capable of expressing them clearly and

interestingly. Besides this, as one reads him, one is conscious of the presence of a serious talent, as yet largely inarticulate, and wasting itself on the splitting of hairs and metaphysical word-spinning. His failure at present is partly a failure of generosity. If a critic is lacking in generous responsiveness it is in vain for him to write about the poets. The critic has duties as a destroyer, but chiefly in the same sense as a gold-washer. His aim is the discovery of gold. Mr. Eliot is less of a discoverer in this kind than any critic of distinction who is now writing. Otherwise he could hardly have written the sort of attack he writes on Professor Gilbert Murray's translation of Euripides, in which he overlooks the one supreme fact that calls for a critic's explanation —the fact that Professor Murray alone among English translators has (whether imperfectly or not) brought Euripides to birth as an author for the modern world. Let Mr. Eliot for the next ten years take as his patron saint the woman in the New Testament who found the piece of silver, instead of Johannes Agricola in joyless meditation. He will find her not only better company, but a wiser counsellor. He may even find his sentences infected with her cheerful excitement, for want of which as yet they can break neither into a phrase nor into a smile.

XIV

MR. NORMAN DOUGLAS'S DISLIKES

Mr. Norman Douglas has, in *Alone,* written a book of hatred tempered with archæology and laughter. Luckily, there is very little archæology and enough laughter to make the hatred enjoyable without being infectious. It is not that Mr. Douglas does not like some of his fellow-creatures. He likes heretics and jolly beggars. He liked Ouida. But, if Mr. Douglas likes you, the danger is that he will throw you at somebody else's head. That is what he does with Ouida, whom he glorifies as "the last, almost the last, of lady authors." He throws her at the head of the age in general—at "our anæmic and wooly generation," at "our actual womanscribes" with "their monkey-tricks and cleverness," at "our vegetarian world-reformers who are as incapable of enthusiasm as they are of contempt, because their blood temperature is invariably two degrees below normal," and finally at an American

novelist described as "this feline and gelatinous New Englander." That gives a fair enough impression of Mr. Douglas's attitude to the human race as seen at close quarters.

He has in a measure justified his attitude by making an amusing book of it. Mr. Douglas has a well-stored and alert mind, full of by-ways, that makes for good conversation. As we read him we feel that we are listening to the racy monologues of a traveller with a special gift for pouring out the comedy of his discomforts in abusive form. He tells us how he landed—"with one jump—in Hell," which is his name for Siena in winter. "I hate Viareggio at all seasons," he tells us farther on, and he describes the inhabitants as "birds of prey: a shallow and rapacious brood." At Pisa, when he arrives, "the Arno is the emblem of Despair . . . like a torrent of liquid mud—irresolute whether to be earth or water." He finds a good landlady at Corsanico, but he immediately remembers how he had "lived long at the mercy of London landladies and London charwomen—having suffered the torments of Hell, for more years than I care to remember, at the hands of those pickpockets and hags and harpies and drunken sluts" . . . "those London sharks and furies." At Rome the remembrance of a "sweet old lady friend" sets him thinking also of her

husband, "a worm, a good man in the worst sense of the word," "the prince of moralisers, the man who first taught me how contemptible the human race may become"—"what a face: gorgonising in its assumption of virtue"—"he ought to have throttled himself at his mother's breast." The absence of mosquitoes and the fewness of the flies at Rome reminds him again of his sufferings at the hands, so to speak, of flies in other places. "One of the most cherished projects of my life," he declares, "is to assemble, in a kind of anthology, all the invectives that have been hurled since the beginning of literature against this loathly dirt-born insect, this living carrion, this blot on the Creator's reputation—and thereto add a few of my own." The noise of the Roman trams leads him, while lying in bed, to devote the morning hours to "the malediction of all modern progress, wherein I include, with firm impartiality, every single advancement in culture which happens to lie between my present state and that comfortable cavern in whose shelter I can see myself ensconced as of yore, peacefully sucking somebody's marrow, while my women, round the corner, are collecting a handful of acorns for my dessert," after which he goes on to denounce the telephone as "that diabolic invention" and the Press for "cretinising" the public mind. At

Olevana, it is the nightingale that rouses him to imprecations:

> One of them elects to warble in deplorably full-throated ease immediately below my bedroom window. When this particular fowl sets up its din at about 3.45 a.m. it is a veritable explosion: an ear-rending, nerve-shattering explosion of noise. . . . It is that blasted bird clearing its throat for a five-hours' entertainment. . . . A brick. Methinks I begin to see daylight. . . .

Mr. Douglas, it is only fair to say, explains that Italian nightingales do not sing like English nightingales. But I fancy that Mr. Douglas sat down, when he began these sketches, in the mood for writing comic scarifications, and neither bird nor man, city nor river, was safe from his harsh laughter. He hurls a pen where King Saul in similar mood hurled a spear, and we must concede that he hurls it with force.

Even nightingales, however, do not infuriate him as Victorians and Puritans do. When he writes angrily about nightingales you feel that he is only being amusing. When he writes about Victorians, you realise that he is positively white with anger. "It was not Nero . . ." he cries, "but our complacent British reptiles, who filled the prisons with the wailing of young children, and hanged a boy of thirteen for stealing a spoon." And again: "What a self-sufficient and

inhuman brood were the Victorians of that type, hag-ridden by their nightmare of duty; a brood that has never been called by its proper name." Mr. Douglas, at any rate, has done his best. He even gives us "a nation of canting shop-keepers," but becomes more original with "hermaphrodite middle-classes." But his real objection is neither to Victorianism nor to Puritanism; it is to Christianity, as we see when he writes of self-indulgence:

> Self-indulgence, I thought. Heavily fraught is that word; weighted with meaning. The history of two thousand years of spiritual dyspepsia lies embedded in its four syllables. Self-indulgence—it is what the ancients blithely called "indulging one's genius." Self-indulgence! How debased an expression nowadays. What a text for a sermon on the mishaps of good words and good things. How all the glad warmth and innocence have faded out of the phrase. What a change has crept over us.

Mr. Douglas is frankly on the side of the pagans —not the real pagans who were rather like ordinary Christians, but the modern pagans who detest Christianity. This paganism is merely egoism in its latest form. It is anti-human, as when Mr. Douglas exclaims:

> Consider well your neighbour, what an imbecile he is. . . . The sage will go his way, prepared to find

himself growing ever more out of sympathy with vulgar trends of opinion, for such is the inevitable development of thoughtful and self-respecting minds.

Such is his creed, and in the result his laughter, though often amusing, is never happy. There is the laughter of sympathy, which is Shakespeare's, and there is the laughter of antipathy, which is Mr. Douglas's. That is, perhaps, why his publishers say that his is "a book for the fastidious in particular." You could not say of Shakespeare that he is "for the fastidious in particular."

We must grant an author his point of view, however, and the fact remains that, however we may differ from Mr. Douglas's preaching, we go on reading him with pleasure, protest and curiosity. He puts his life into his sentences, and so he stamps with experience even such a piece of topographical information as:

From here, if you are in the mood, you may descend eastward over the Italian frontier, crossing the stream which is spanned lower down by the bridge of St. Louis, and find yourself at Mortola Superiore (try the wine) and then at Mortola proper (try the wine).

He is nearly always amusing about wine, whether it is good or bad. But that is only one of his moods. He also talks to you as a naturalist, as an archæologist, as a biologist, or will begin to make

some odd book that you are never likely to read live for you; he has discovered an author called Ramage who is perhaps the most real and comical person of whom he writes. There is a vein of cruelty or of selfishness in some of the others who follow one another through his pages. The worst of them is the "phenomenally brutal" sportsman who, along with Mr. Douglas, gave a dead rat to a sow to eat:

> She engulfed the corpse methodically, beginning at the end, working her way through breast and entrails while her chops dripped with gore, and ending with the tail, which gave some little trouble to masticate, on account, of its length and tenuity. Altogether decidedly good sport. . . .

That is disgusting, but it is interesting. We may say the same of the sardonic account of the way in which lizards are played with in Italy:

> It is not very amusing to be either a snake or a lizard in Italy. Lizards are caught in nooses and then tied by one leg and made to run on the remaining three; or secured by a cord round the neck and swung about in the air—mighty good sport, this; or deprived of their tails and given to the baby or cat to play with; or dragged along at the end of a string, like a reluctant pig that is led to market. There are quite a number of ways of making a lizard feel at home.

On the whole, one prefers to read Mr. Douglas on the subject of wine, or on the rarity of the use of red things (wine excepted) in Italy, or on the little flames that are supposed to be seen at night over the graves in cemeteries. Mr. Douglas may be gross at times, but he is never a bore. He gives us a meal of many courses, and allows none of the courses to last too long. But it would be a more enjoyable meal if we did not hear in the crabbed laughter of our host the undertones of despair—the despair that comes of "considering your neighbour, what an imbecile he is," and failing to realise that in order to enjoy his imbecility to the full you must first see him a little lower than the angels. Cervantes did this. Dickens did it. Mr. Chesterton does it. That is why they are not "for the fastidious in particular."

XV

M. ANDRÉ GIDE MAKES A JOKE

Lady Rothermere does not measure her praise of M. Gide, whose *Prometheus Illbound* she has translated into English. His is "a mind," she declares, "which must be ranked among the greatest of the world's literature." "Must" is a challenging word. Of how many contemporary writers dare we use it in this sense? Dare we use it of Anatole France, or Bergson, or Hardy, or Shaw, or d'Annunzio, or Croce? We should be foolhardy, indeed, much as we rightly admire these authors, to put any of them just yet into the pantheon that contains the images of Plato and Shakespeare and Voltaire. Call no man happy till he is dead, says an old proverb. It would be still wiser to call no man one of the world's greatest writers till he has been dead a hundred years. One cannot, if one is a quite human being, judge one's contemporaries with the same impartial scrutiny with which one

judges the mighty dead. The great man gives to his own age much to which posterity is indifferent, and gives to posterity much to which his own age may even be hostile. Tennyson served his age as a giant, and he was accepted as a giant by most of the fine critics of his age, from Edgar Allan Poe downwards. If an occasional critic such as Edward FitzGerald came to have doubts about Tennyson, it was because he himself stood monastically aloof from the age. It is one of the functions of criticism, no doubt, to separate the temporary from the immortal elements in the work of contemporary writers. But this is one of the counsels of perfection in criticism. The thing has never been infallibly done. Sainte-Beuve was as ridiculous in writing about Balzac as Lamb was about Shelley. Not that even posterity is capable of pronouncing what we call final judgments. We have a way of turning to posterity in despair for a true verdict on authors. Alas! posterity, though it has not the same reasons for erroneous judgments, is (like ourselves) of a variable and uncertain mind. Posterity has made strange blunders about Euripides, about Ronsard, about Donne, about Pope. Good authors constantly have to be rescued from the neglect of posterity. All we can be sure of is that an author who appeals to a succession of

generations has given us something of the true gold of literature. Even if each new generation to some extent re-estimates the world's classics, it usually leaves them secure in the position of classics. Or almost secure, for who knows whether the world will not one day cease to read Lucian or Virgil, or *The Pilgrim's Progress*?

As for contemporary literature, how much of it is there that we dare confidently add to the ranks even of the minor classics? One is sure of a certain number of lyrics, notably those of Mr. Yeats. But in prose one has to be more cautious. Prose, as Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch lamented the other day, has fallen upon styleless days, and without style it is difficult to live for ever. Plutarch has survived with a minimum of it, and so has Marcus Aurelius, and so has Balzac. But on the whole, it must be admitted that most of the great writers, whether in prose or poetry, wrote well. M. Gide, it must be admitted, writes admirably, though not wonderfully. Lady Rothermere does not communicate the delicacies of his style in *Prometheus Illbound,* but one could not read even this translation without feeling that the author is a man of skill and wit in words. I doubt, however, whether there is enough style in it to give it a place on a shelf with the world's important books. Lady Rother-

mere does not assert, indeed, that *Prometheus Illbound* is itself a masterpiece. She claims for it only that it is "the expression of the humorous side" of one of the world's greatest minds. The humour, it seems to me, is too elusive to proceed from a great mind. Great minds, if they are humorous at all, are humorous in such a way that the ordinary man can see at least a part of the joke. M. Gide makes jokes for the favoured few. Many a man who is amused by the jokes of Plato and of Gibbon will be merely bewildered by the jokes of M. Gide. He enjoys the swift change of episode as Sterne does, but, whereas Sterne always saves the situation by giving us comic human beings passing across his haphazard stage, M. Gide does not create human beings at all. Lady Rothermere admits that "his world is a world of abstract ideas, under the action of which most of his characters move as marionettes." She quotes: "Time and space are the boards which, with the help of our minds, have been set up by the innumerable truths of the universe as a stage for their own performances. And there we play our parts like determined, convinced, devoted, and voluptuous marionettes." This dilettante and purely intellectual attitude to life is, I believe, impossible to a great mind. It is very tedious to hear senti-

mental people repeating the platitude that "great thoughts come from the heart"; but the platitude happens to be true. Shakespeare, it may be replied, in some of his moods saw the world as a stage and an "insubstantial pageant." On the other hand, he never saw men and women as marionettes. He was always interested in character, and M. Gide is not. M. Gide is interested in problems. He is interested in ideas. He is not interested in men and women. He is a philosopher at play. Even when he introduces a tragic element into his work, as in *Le Roi Candaule,* we feel that the whole thing is a game, an experiment. A great deal of modern French literature makes one think of clever men amusing themselves in a laboratory. The French are Epicureans of ideas. They test creeds and philosophies and scepticisms with an exquisite freshness of curiosity. They seek after truth itself as an amusement. In no other nation can men talk so admirably of the universe while smoking cigarettes. In England, if a man talks of God, he either lights a pipe or stops smoking.

In *Prometheus Illbound* M. Gide has lit a cigarette, a rather fragrant cigarette, at the sun. There is perhaps something a little disproportionate in the action, something, too, a little au-

dacious; but he does it, if the phrase is not too stale, with a fine gesture, and as he puffs at it, the glow of his cigarette seems to throw a tiny light on the immense problems of human existence. He is cosmic in his interests, if Parisian in his manners. He has Zeus and Prometheus and the eagle among his chief characters. Zeus, like M. Gide himself, is an experimentalist. He evidently rules the universe for the sensations with which it provides him. At least, when we find him walking along the most famous of the Parisian boulevards, he has just made up his mind to perform a perfectly gratuitous act—an act which not only will bring no return but will have no motive. In this mood, he drops a handkerchief in the street, and, when a thin gentleman named Cocles gives it back to him, he invites him to write the address of anyone he pleases on an envelope so that he may send a £20 note to him. The thin gentleman writes the name of Damocles which he has seen by accident, and Zeus strikes him on the face and disappears. He sends Damocles the £20 note, however. Damocles becomes worried as to where the anonymous note has come from and why. His good fortune, instead of satisfying him, only raises problems in his mind. He does not know to whom he owes it or what to do with it. The last we see of him,

he is babbling incoherent questions about it on his death-bed.

Some time before this, however, Prometheus has arrived, and dined with Cocles and Damocles in a Paris restaurant. He finds Cocles discoursing in perplexity on the meaningless blow he had received from the unknown stranger, and he himself unwittingly becomes the cause of a second and still more distressing accident to Cocles. The conversation having turned on his eagle, Cocles and Damocles express their desire to see it, and Prometheus calls it from afar, whereupon "bursting through the window, it put out Cocles' eye with one stroke with its wing, and then, chirruping as it did so, tenderly indeed but imperiously, fell with a swoop upon Prometheus' right side. And Prometheus forthwith undid his waistcoat and offered his liver to the bird." For the moment, however, we may leave Prometheus. The important event just now is the damage to Cocles' eye. Neither the undeserved blow nor the accident to his eye ultimately causes misery as the undeserved £20 causes Damocles misery. When he sees Damocles' misery on his death-bed, Cocles comments: "There you see the fate of a man who has grown rich by another's suffering." "But is it true that you suffer?" Prometheus asks him. "From my eye occasion-

ally," said Cocles, "but from the blow no more; I prefer to have received it. It does not burn any more; it has revealed to me my goodness. I am flattered by it; I am pleased about it. I never cease to think that my pain was useful to my neighbour and that it brought him £20." "But the neighbour is dying of it," said Prometheus. . . . It is clear that M. Gide has not taken it as his province to justify the ways of God to man. I fancy he suspects Zeus of having acted without a motive on many previous occasions before the strange adventure of the boulevard. He is also clearly amused by the workings of the human conscience. If Damocles had not had a conscience, he would not have died.

Cocles and Damocles, however, are only minor characters in this thin fantastic story. Prometheus is the real hero, though the accidents do not happen to him. He has only his eagle and his habit of lecturing about it. But it is his lectures about his eagle that give the book its meaning. His eagle is really a figure in an allegory—an allegory on a new plan. In the old-fashioned allegory one was more conscious of what the allegorical figures meant, than of the figures themselves. It was as if the author had tied labels round their necks. M. Gide realizes that we have got beyond such ancient simplicities.

He conseqently gives his figures no labels, but bids us "Guess!" and we go on guessing till the end of the story. He has constructed a puzzle, and, though we do not know whether it is worth solving or not, he contrives to make us immensely curious about it and immensely determined to solve it. Most people, when they have read his story, will ask, "What does he mean? What is this eagle of Prometheus?" Why does he first say that everyone has an eagle and that one must nourish one's eagle? And why does he in the end kill his eagle and make a meal of it? And does M. Gide approve of the last proceeding? I see that the majority of critics identify the eagle with the human conscience. I think it is more than that. It is everything that prevents man from resting satisfied with a pagan philosophy of acceptance before the world's beauty. It is that fury in the human breast that makes men desire progress. It is the moral consciousness of the race that leads men into profound self-denials and profounder questionings. When Prometheus kills and eats his eagle, he grows fat and cheerful. Does M. Gide then look back regretfully on the moral history of mankind? On the contrary. The eagle was found to be delicious, and at dessert they all drank his health. " 'Has he,

then, been useless?' asked one. 'Do not say that, Cocles!—his flesh has nourished us. When I questioned him he answered nothing; but I eat him without bearing him a grudge: if he had made me suffer less, he would have been less fat; less fat he would have been less delectable.' 'Of his past beauty, what is there left?' 'I have kept all his feathers.'" "It is with one of them," adds M. Gide, "that I write this little book." Yes, M. Gide is a moralist, though a gay one, and *Prometheus Illbound* is a tract. He, too, desires progress—even if it be progress somewhere beyond and away from progress. His book is an amusing, though not a very amusing, parable. It will appeal to those who prefer subtle little thoughts to vehement great ones.

FINALE

THE CRITIC

People often forget that criticism, like poetry, is of many kinds. The critics themselves are, perhaps, the worst transgressors in the matter. They are divided into almost as many sects as the theologians, and every sect but one regards its own standards as the very rules of salvation. This would not matter so much if it did not lead to the excommunication of all the critics who cannot subscribe to the same creed. There is nothing more absurd in the history of literature than the severities of the excommunicating sort of critic. A critic has the right to condemn any work, critical or other, which is bad of its kind. He has not the right to say that only his own kind of criticism is good. There are as many ways of writing about books as of writing about flowers. The poet reveals to us a different flower from the flower of the botanist. Wordsworth's "small celandine" is not seen through the same eyes as the plant of which the botanist tells us: "The lesser celandine is a species of *Ranunculus* (*R. Ficarus*), a small low-growing herb with smooth heart-shaped

leaves and bright yellow flowers about an inch across, borne each on a stout stalk springing from a leaf-axil." There is yet another sort of writer on flowers whose work is a charming compound of poetry, science and any sort of relevant gossip, whether philological or herbalist—who will inform us, for instance, that *Ranunculus* is a diminutive of *rana,* "a frog," which has the same damp, marshy haunts as the flower, and that Nicholas Culpepper held that even to carry the plant about one's body next the skin helped to cure piles. These are but three out of scores of ways of writing about flowers, and it is mere sectarianism to deny the excellence of any of them.

It is, of course, open to the man of science to declare that Wordsworth was not a botanist. It is possible, indeed, that Wordsworth did not know that his "host of golden daffodils" belonged to the natural order *Amaryllidaceæ.* This, however, would be to quarrel about words. Wordsworth and the man of science alike give an honest report of the flowers they have seen, and for my part I find Wordsworth's report the more interesting. It is much the same with books as with flowers. The scientific critic shakes his head over the imaginative treatment of books. His ideal critic would write about books in the spirit of a Linnæus

rather than of a Wordsworth. This, I think, is to take a narrow view of criticism. Criticism is an art which has developed in a score of different directions, and it is best to use the word in a sense that includes them all. Criticism—good criticism, at least—is almost any sort of good writing about books by a man or woman of taste. Criticism, says the dictionary, is the art of judging. As a matter of fact, criticism is something more than that. The good critic does a great deal more than deliver judgments on books and authors. He may at times play the part of the defending counsel rather than that of the judge. There are occasions on which he makes no attempt to hide the warmth of his feelings. He cannot announce a masterpiece as though a summary of pros and cons expressed what it meant to him. That is why I like to think of a critic as a portrait-painter rather than a judge. The portrait-painter reveals the character of his subject. He does not label or analyse it so much as set before us a synthesis of all the most interesting things he has seen, felt and thought in observing it. The judgment is always there, but it may be implicit rather than explicit. The author sits to the critic for his portrait. Even the book may be said—if we may put a slight constraint on language—to sit to the critic for its portrait. In criticism the character-

sketch of the book or author is as important as any technical analysis. Criticism is a magic mirror, in which a work of art is reflected with a new emphasis and in new relations. The critic must bathe his subject in the light of his own mind—his taste, his enthusiasm, his moral ideas, his knowledge. Hence criticism is an extremely personal thing. It relates, if one may adapt Anatole France's famous phrase, the adventures of masterpieces in the soul of the critic, or—to put it a little more precisely—in the intellectual and imaginative world of the critic.

It is said that, if we adopt this view, we are denying the existence of any standards in criticism. This is not so. One may believe in the conscience while admitting that moral standards fluctuate. Similarly, one may believe in the literary conscience while admitting that literary standards fluctuate. There is an eternal difference between good and evil, but what seems good to one generation may seem evil to another, and it is possible to recognise the goodness of a man, such as an Old Testament polygamist or a Scottish Sabbatarian, whose moral standards are in conflict with ours. We can hold to our own moral standards while realising that they are not the only conceivable moral standards. There is, no doubt, a perfect moral standard somewhere, but

only a perfect spirit could perceive it. The rest of us can but do our best, and we cannot even do that. Milton was right when he made "all-judging Jove" the one supreme critic of literature. Meanwhile, the standards of sublunar critics are but guesses. The critic who claims that they are more is simply a dogmatist who climbs into a pulpit when he should be going on a pilgrimage.

Brunetière accused Anatole France of having no standards, and it is possible that Anatole France does not subscribe to any Thirty-nine Articles of criticism. But if to have a conscience is to have standards, and if taste is conscience in the æsthetic world, who can deny that Anatole France has very fine literary standards indeed? It is obvious that he all the time measures an author by the excellence of all the authors he has loved, just as most of us get our standards of character from the love and veneration we have felt for good men. This love of excellence is indisputably the first of all the requisites of a critic—love of excellence and acquaintance with excellence. The critic's first standard is his enthusiasm for the great writers. "By 'poetry,' in these pages," says Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch in one of his books of criticism, "I mean what has been written by Homer, Dante, Shakespeare and some others." It is an admirable definition. It

puts us in touch with the writer's standards at once. It suggests, too, the reflection that all the good critics have been men who agreed in the main with posterity in regard to literature. They have accepted the tradition. Even the revolutionary critics, such as Coleridge, have accepted the tradition for the most part, while advancing on it. It is scarcely possible for a man so whimsical or irreverent of the tradition as Samuel Butler to be a good critic. Nor is the man who cannot enter into the tradition that puts Homer and Dante and Shakespeare among the greatest of the poets capable of criticising the free verse of our own day. There is clearly, however, a danger in traditionalism. To criticise not in the spirit but in the letter of the tradition is to become a formalist, a pedant, and it is probable that the French injured their literature in the seventeenth century by their too literal respect for the Greeks. The critic must have respect for the life of his own times as well as for the writings of the dead. He cannot safely yield to the belief that great literature is a temple that has already been built. If he does not know that creation is still going on, he is little more than a guide to the ruins of classical architecture.

The critic must be governed by his sense of life, both in men and in books. The sense of the past

alone is not enough. Even as he reads Æschylus or Shakespeare, it is his sense of life, not his sense of the past, that is the more important. Hence the best critics have been men in whom the sense of life, which is the imaginative artist's sense, has been strong. They have been, for the most part, men who have also attempted with some success other forms of literature—poets, novelists, essayists, such as Coleridge, Sainte-Beuve, Lamb, Matthew Arnold and Anatole France. The old sneer that the critics are men who have failed in literature might almost be reversed, so far as the good critics are concerned. The good critics are men who have succeeded in literature.

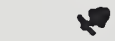
A good critic tells us as interesting things about his subject as Gilbert White tells us about a bird. It is essentially the same kind of illuminated observation that enables Gilbert White to write well about a blackcap and Anatole France to write well about Pierre Loti. "With an exquisitely delicate skin," we are told of Loti, "he feels nothing deeply. While all the pleasures and sorrows of the world leap around him like dancing girls before a Rajah, his soul remains empty and depressed, indolent and unoccupied. Nothing has entered it. This is an excellent disposition for the writing of pages which perturb

the reader." To deny the possession of critical standards to a writer whose work is full of imaginative criticism such as this is to speak of standards as though they were a sort of plumb-line existing entirely outside the imagination of the critic. It is to fail to see that, as Anatole France says, "every book has as many different aspects as it has readers and a poem like a landscape, is transformed in all the eyes that see it, in all the souls that conceive it." It is the object of the critic to enable us to share this magical transformation with him, not to issue immutable decrees. Anatole France, it may be, exaggerates the personal element in criticism at the expense of the traditional. He compares himself to a man who goes about "placing rustic benches in the sacred woods and near the fountains of the Muses." "It demands neither system nor learning," he declares, "and only requires a pleasant astonishment before the beauty of things. Let the village dominie, the land surveyor, measure the road and set up the milestones!" This is extravagant and fanciful, but it shows us at least the bright side of the moon of criticism. The other side of the moon is useful, but it is not the side that gives us light.

THE END

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